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Centre for Indian Writers

Contemporary Indian Poetry 1

General Editor
Prabhakar Padhye

An Anthology of Marathi Poetry (1945-65)

Edited by
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General Editor's Preface

One of the factors preventing cross-fertilization of the regional cultures of India is the well-known language-barrier.

The multi-lingual, multi-cultural character of the Indian society has given it a unique personality—with a unique challenge and an equally unique opportunity. But it has also prevented the emergence of a pan-Indian tradition in the different cultural fields.

The lack is particularly felt at the present time. It is well-known that there has been in the post-War period a burst of creative activity in the different linguistic cultures of India—particularly in the literary field. The literatures in the different languages of India are undergoing a radical experimentation at the hands of younger writers who are products of the world born out of the ashes of the war. This has lent a new vitality to Indian writing. But the readers and writers in one Indian language are prevented from knowing at first hand this vital experimentation in other Indian languages.

This language-barrier indeed poses a larger problem in the context of the current transformation of the Indian society. The awakening of the modern spirit allied with the liberal democratic ethic needs an interlingual, intercultural exchange on physical and mental levels. Above all, it requires a mutual confrontation of the creative experiments going on in the different cultural fields. The language-barrier prevents this confrontation.

The sensitive writer feels this all the more acutely. Creativity feeds on cross-fertilization. To a great extent the Indian writer derives this from the study of Western literatures. But it lacks the intimacy which a cross-fertilization of Indian literatures participating in the pervasive Indian culture would naturally create.

Efforts are indeed made to break through the language-barrier. Translations are published. But they are few and qualitatively often inadequate. Occasionally, a book containing all the pieces —good, bad and indifferent — of a prominent Indian writer is published. In such a book the grain is hardly separated from

the chaff. On the other hand, we sometimes have 'impartially' representative anthologies of writings in an Indian language. These contain one or two pieces of almost all the writers in the languages.

Increasing efforts on the part of official institutions and private editors to introduce Indian writing by means of reviews and critical assessments fail to create the intimacy of feeling which an acquaintance with the original piece—even debased by translation—can create.

The Centre for Indian writers has therefore planned the publication of the present series, which will contain two books for each major Indian language, one of contemporary poetry and the other of contemporary short story. Each book will present, in English translation, work by the creative writers of the post-War period. The book will not aim at being 'just' representative, but will try to project significant creativity. It will carry an extensive critical introduction seeking to place the presented work from this point of view.

We hope that this series will be a fruitful step towards the appreciation of the creative experiments currently going on in the different regional literatures of India, and contribute towards the emergence of a variegated but integrated Indian cultural tradition.

PRABHAKAR PADHYE

General Editor

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Introduction

PART I : *The Broken Gestalt*

The devastating transformation of sensibility that is associated with the modern revolt in the fine arts has been a worldwide phenomenon. The changes have been most drastic in cultures with a depth of tradition in diverse fields of expression, and this is both astonishing and remarkable. Most probably the cultures that broke off violently from the tradition were the very cultures that had a deep-rooted sense of their native ways of feeling, because it was individuals in these cultures who experienced the deepest trauma when technological advance and a vast, totally mechanised society that began enjoying the fruits of a mass civilization broke up their sense of an organic inner life.

Marathi poetry has a tradition which is no less than seven centuries old. The first major Marathi poet, Dnyanadeva, was a contemporary of Dante Alighieri, and was a poet comparable to his famous counterpart in stature. Tukaram, the 17th century mystic and poet, produced in Marathi a kind of poetry that has gained in living significance three centuries after the death of the man who wrote it. Yet, just before the turn of the last century, the situation in Marathi literature was very different from the situation in European literature, which today is as much a part of our literary and artistic consciousness as the tradition of Dnayandeva and Tukaram. In fact, from the last decade of the 19th century to the first four decades of the present one was a period of two dominant but decadent influences in Marathi literature. When British education replaced the native tradition, a period of cultural dislocation began. The new norms of poetry were the British Victorian norms which were not easy to graft on the native literary tradition, which, since the end of the age of Tukaram, was in the doldrums anyway. On the other hand, the influence of English poetry was a peculiarly limited influence: it began and ended with that miniature

monument to Victorian literary taste, *The Golden Treasury*. Now the Romantic revolt in English poetry was not a mere switching over to a new literary style in rejection of an exhausted, established style. It was something much deeper. It was, first and foremost, the creative necessity of a sensibility that faced an imminent dead-end on the one hand, and the ominous intimations of the Industrial Revolution on the other. All art is seismographic: it is stimulated by the slightest shocks to existing culture; and every time the moral code attached to the set spectrum of feelings is dislocated, art shows a frenzied excitement. The Christian God was already fatally afflicted by the time the Romantic movement began to gather momentum. When Nietzsche and Rimbaud on their different planes of vision celebrated His death, it was also the death of Romanticism. Modern poetry began as a substitute for religious faith: it was essentially an attempt to restore the lost ethical and emotional equilibrium. The metaphysical animal had suddenly been freed: art revealed its terror and ecstasy in the new world without God. This was in Europe. The Romantic movement was dying there. In India, in Maharashtra, this movement was a sudden new stylistic revelation. The style was discovered first, and a sensibility to match was developed later (how very un-Romantic!).

But this whole period is extremely interesting as a period of breathless change. What took nearly a century and a half to happen in England, happened within a hurried half century in Marathi literature. During the second world war the attitude matured and ripened. It became bold enough to shatter the gestalt established by the immediately preceding generations. It began to approach the seven-century-old tradition and to see in it a gestalt of its own choice. At the same time its organic links with contemporary pan-literature were confirmed. Thus an authentic quest for identity in the contemporary world began. The poet B. S. Mardhekar was the most remarkable product of the cross-pollination between the deeper, larger native tradition and contemporary world culture.

Re-making of a Lost Tradition

Every culture has its own norms of art and we tend to regard them as creations of the peculiar genius of that culture. It would

be wrong to regard the concept of poetry underlying the work of poets from a past period or an alien culture as identical with our own, when even the individual concepts of poetry in the same period and culture show a radical diversity. We see in a tradition the gestalt of our own choice, and reading the poetry of the past or of an alien culture with our own sensibility we discover unexpected affinities or receive an unexpected stimulus. This is what happened most spectacularly when T. S. Eliot rediscovered the Elizabethans and the whole of the European poetic tradition in his own way. This again is what happened when Ezra Pound discovered Chinese poetry and also the craftsmanship of the Provençal verse-makers early in this century. These discoveries and redicoveries have exerted a profound influence on modern Anglo-American poetry. In their impact they are comparable to the impact of Japanese prints on the visual sensibility of French painters before the turn of the last century, or the rediscovery of primitive art on the whole development of the plastic arts during this century. There are parallels to such paroxysmal changes in sensibility caused by an exposure to different modes of expression in every fine art. Besides, the arts have the tendency to influence one another, although across the media such changes assume characteristics too complex to analyse.

Mardhekar's case is almost typical. He returned to the poetry of Tukaram and Ramdas by discovering not only potent stylistic devices in their work but also an affinity with their sensibilities. The agony of Tukaram in search of God, and the hard hitting moral didactic of Ramdas were something which could assume a new poignancy in the post-war situation which had led to a crisis in his individual way of feeling. Both the saint-poets belonged to his own linguistic-cultural groups, and adopting their communicative devices could give his own expression an evocative depth and a new dimension. In this attempt, Mardhekar was almost a literal follower of Eliot the literary critic and practitioner of verse. But Mardhekar's tone and temper are essentially Marathi, in spite of the fact that he has also used techniques evolved through contact with surrealism and expressionism.

The jazzy, syncopated rhythms used by the saint poets of the past found a new application in Mardhekar's verse. Their sinewy, organic metaphors which delineate a cosmology while

expressing a charged emotion with simplicity and control found apt uses in his work. But there was a vital difference between him and his models. The saint poets did violence to reason through emotion, and thus achieved a raw power. Mardhekar, on the other hand, did violence to emotion through reason. His ingrained sophistry and classicism were opposed to the Dionysiac agony and ecstasy of Tukaram. Mardhekar is an excellent example of the split-personality of the modern poet trying to still an anarchy of the mind in a formal harmony and yet torn between style and functional language. Poets who followed Mardhekar, particularly the early and later Vinda Karandikar (he came into his own only briefly, during the middle of his poetic career), impaled poetry through the violence of reason. They were lesser poets too, incidentally, while Mardhekar, despite his flaws, was one of the finest poets in the Marathi tradition.

The return to the deeper and larger tradition, combined with the immediate heritage of Western poetry, and the spirit of restless individual experiment, resulted in a remaking of the tradition itself. It is interesting to note how an *avant garde* poet like Arun Kolatkar has roots in a similar dual heritage. The brilliant new novelist and poet (although his poetic output is scanty) Bhalchandra Nemade has returned to the literature of the old, monastic cult of the *Mahanubhavas* discovering an affinity in sensibility. This is an almost symptomatic trend in contemporary Marathi literature. Kolatkar has given us brilliant translations from the poetry of Tukaram, and in remaking them in English he has used a slangy, modern idiom that states emotion with elemental and barbaric simplicity, in vigourous metaphors derived from day to day life, but with devastating metaphysical implications. Kolatkar's Marathi poems show the impact of the work of the saint poets in their texture, and his automatic, surrealistic method gives their poetic devices uniquely new functions.

It is not one tradition that is being remade today. Every poet who has tried to rediscover the tradition has made an incision into different parts of the poetry of the past and, as I said earlier, each one sees in the tradition a gestalt of his own choice. It is not a clinical study of the past but a temperamental translation of what appears related to one's own sensibility. The same approach comes into action when influences from the whole

range of pan-literature are at work in contemporary Marathi poetry: this stands in clear contradistinction from the "High English" period of the late 19th century onwards.

The Strange Fruits of Cross-pollination

One of the events following the end of the last world war was the paperback revolution in the publishing industry, which has made a very deep, but so far underestimated, impact on the growth of Marathi literature.

Before the war, books were costly and difficult to acquire. Moreover, the majority of publications available to readers came almost exclusively from British publishing houses, and no translations of literature from other languages were available. Our contact with the outside world was through the English language, and this traffic was exclusive and one-sided. Add to this the fixed rigidity of the conditioned reflexes given to us by the Victorian attitude which was the product of the "High English" period, and one has a clear picture of the kind of cross-cultural influences we were exposed to. The paperback revolution also coincided with a feverish activity in translation. Literature from all over the world began to be competently translated into English, and became immediately available in the form of inexpensive paperbacks. This unleashed a tremendous variety of cross-influences almost of a sudden. The influences ranged from classical Greek and Chinese to contemporary French, German, Spanish, Russian and Italian. The intellectual proletariat that was the product of the rise in literacy was exposed to these diverse influences. A pan-literary context was created.

In cities like Bombay, where social organization had become very complex, new writers very much unlike the academic men of letters in the past, began to emerge. Today the gulf between the two types of literary artists is widening. The whole situation is in flux. At no other time in the recent past was such a diversity in sensibilities working in the same broad sphere of literary creation.

Cross-pollination bears strange fruits. Mardhekar wrote books on literary criticism and aesthetic theory which make references to contacts with various European works of art and literature. In his work (he wrote some experimental novels besides

poems) we see a variety of influences. During his formative years as a writer, he was deeply influenced by Joyce and Eliot, and these continued to be critical influences on his creative writing throughout his career, until his untimely death in 1956.

Rimbaud and the surrealists were the dominant influences on Arun Kolatkar through the period 1955-62, his most productive. One discerns an influence of the surrealists and the Russian futurists (an odd combination) in the work of Sharachandra Muktibodh from the early forties through the mid-fifties. A lot of Sadanand Rege's work seems to fall in line with the expressionist movement. These poets are original, and are far from imitative. But their work is linked with pan-literary trends. Some of these comparisons may seem a little far-fetched when we seek surface resemblances. It may also seem that I am using the methods of an impressario, mainly name-dropping, in presenting the work of poets little known to the English-speaking world, including India. But we must remember that poems are organic products of individual minds, and that temperamental affinities are not the same thing as formal resemblances. Surrealism in Spanish and Latin American poetry produced strikingly different results from those it produced in French. The individual genius of the poet, his native language and culture, and the contingencies of specific literary and cultural situations, make these influences *transformative* in character. Their outcome, if of any intrinsic importance at all, has a ring of native integrity. It is also a unique development of (and departure from) the original influence which undergoes an organic change as it is adapted by the influenced sensibility.

Poetry and the Death of the Individual

The sense of uprooting or rootlessness that pervades the scene is not unique to Marathi poetry. It is a generic characteristic of all modern literature, and indeed has parallels in the other arts. The pre-Industrial Age correlatives of religious, mythological, and folk traditional symbols, motifs, metaphors and images gradually became a vast vocabulary devoid of organic functions with the rise of materialism. Revolutionary changes in the power-structure of the family and indeed of the community and the whole of society, created a change in the emotional and moral

lives of individuals, while techniques of communication used formerly in religious and ritualistic art assumed new functions in mass-civilization. The mystiques of the Proletariat and the Free Human Community replaced God. This change dislocated the individual from the community by creating a mechanical, dehumanized abstraction of community. He became morally and emotionally isolated. It is interesting to note that pure aestheticism and socio-political commitment in art were both products of the same change. But it is also significant that every great artist in the modern period has sought to give a meaning to human experience by inventing techniques of communication that defy taboos and conditioned-reflexes of this mechanical mass-society. He has striven to assert his vision and the uniqueness of his experience with a vengeance unknown on such a general scale earlier. While his own and other people's life disintegrates around him, he delves into his own psyche to retrieve the archaic legend of man, his own mythical identity. I am not talking of artistic values, but of artistic motivation. The audience of modern art has the same kind of motivation. The sensuous mysticism of symbolist poetry, the Dionysiac orgy of surrealism, the anguished cry of expressionism, even the frenzied verve of dada and futurism were answers to the same moral and spiritual condition. Today (in fact since the last half of the last century), art begins either with a total denial of moral values or in the spirit of unflinching moral commitment. Mysticism or the spirit of crusade, a cry for a new order or the cry of anarchy, are the only two kinds of poetic expression. We continue to live under the famous Nietzschean diarchy of Apollo and Dionysus in the realm of artistic expression.

The individual is dying. He is reduced to the status of a mere number. In a world constantly exposed to subtle techniques of persuasion by advertising and political motivation which exploit every urge, every instinct, every conditioned reflex to build up value-judgements and to excite measured responses, poetry has too much competition from unscrupulous quarters. Socially, it had never faced such a crisis before, and morally the poet's integrity was never threatened more.

PART II : *A Flashback on the Recent Past*

If my attempt to define contemporary Marathi poetry were to depend on constant references to the tradition of Marathi literature, I might start talking in a sort of void. For, this little book is the first anthology of Marathi poetry in English translation, and the reader would have no access to the actual context of Marathi literature. I would therefore restrict my main reference and discussion to the poems offered in the following pages so that the reader can form his own impressions and compare them with my observations.

For the last eighty years or so, Marathi poetry has been the product of a multiple heritage. To be more accurate, until the advent of British education, the norms of literature in Maharashtra were more purely native. Then, exposed to English literature with the suddenness that almost caused a trauma to the sensibility, there was a simultaneous dislocation from the tradition and a hasty transition to an exciting but unfamiliar new concept of literature. Unfortunately, in poetry, this exposure was limited mainly to *The Golden Treasury,* with particular emphasis on part IV! Most of the poetry written at that period showed a marked influence of Romantic poetry in England. But sensibilities cannot be changed overnight, and it takes a longer time to find out one's own identity and function than to discover models for form and affinities with one's own temperament. Marathi critics have not yet fully assessed this chaotic but colourful 'High English' period—as it is locally known—but it is full of retrograde imitativeness combined with the uneasy intimations of purely native parallels to symbolism, which was unknown though contemporaneous.

This exclusive dependence on a certain kind of poetry in English as the source of the highest inspiration made the Marathi poetry till the 'forties a matter of rather contemptible Parnassian craftsmanship coupled with the smugness characteristic of art based on other art and also unfortunately, inspired solely by other art.

Then, during the forties, four poets with their highly original

work moved Marathi poetry out of the morass. They were P. S. Rege, Manmohan Natu, B. S. Mardhekar and Sharachandra Muktibodh.

Mardhekar:

Soon after the end of World War II a thin collection of Marathi poems appeared out of the blue and created a most violent literary storm. Titled simply "Some Poems", the book had a shocking little line drawing on the cover, foreshadowing the shape of things to come. The drawing showed the caricature of a nude male figure, debilitated, weak, impotent, sick, and extremely anti-heroic. The genitals wickedly revealed the impotence. The absence of muscles emphasized the sick, weak and debilitated look of the familiar post-war rational animal. The face looked half guilty, half callous, and perfectly sick.

Inside cover were even more depressing things. A bleak little introductory poem which was a perfect example of self derogation, plainly stated the lack of genius of the poet, who ran himself down in comparison to the great Marathi saint poets of the past. Further on were even bleaker and blacker poems on bleak and black subjects. War, death, mechanical life, lack of guts, lack of faith, lack of ideals, feelings of sickness, nausea, ennui, and a religious terror were the substance and theme of these poems.

The violent reactions this book provoked were comparable to those provoked by the publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal* in 1857. Its author, the late B. S. Mardhekar, like Baudelaire, was put in the docks. The book was prosecuted on the charges of obscenity and its author acquitted—only granted a benefit of doubt. It was called all sorts of names and was described as obscene, filthy, indecent, ugly, immoral, cynical, nihilistic, Fascist, anarchistic and unpoetic. Even the few people who rose to defend it could offer only a crude judgement of its true literary merit. Mardhekar became famous as a martyr and a convict, a genius and a charlatan, a poet and a poseur—all at the same time. Only gradually did people realize that whether good or bad, Mardhekar certainly was a major poet.

Twenty years ago, literary taste in Maharashtra was nothing but a narrow set of conditioned-reflexes, based on a curious

confluence of two equally decadent traditions: the Victorian British ideals of literature and the ornately quasi-classical, Sanskrit-like modes of literary expression. Nearly all the poets of the earlier half century suffered from these severe setbacks. Mardhekar made a breakthrough by reviving the older, more vital, more genuinely Marathi tradition of the saint poets and by combining it with modern European trends to some extent. Here was poetry then, which had no ready context available for itself: the notion of poetry along which Mardhekar's creative process ran was a notion utterly unfamiliar to Marathi readers. Thus began a new period in the history of Marathi taste itself. This little book of poems started a catalytic action which was to continue for about ten years more: creating the two polar groups called the modernists and the traditionals. Then, even when new channels were opened around 1955, when people stood on farther frontiers even to question the relative greatness of Mardhekar, and when 'modernism' was becoming a rather odd and embarrassing critical anachronism, even then Mardhekar remained a poet to be regarded with seriousness and respect.

Mardhekar's poetry is certainly odd, abrupt, clumsy in places, whimsical, suddenly embarrassingly sentimental, rather old hat and aggressively new at the same time—a bundle of paradoxes. In this respect, he matches Eliot and the Pound of *Mauberley*. Also, when he is the stoic and orthodox classical revivalist with an unusually fresh and sensitively original poetic approach, Mardhekar reminds me of the Eliot of the *Waste Land* and *Ash Wednesday*. When he turns a bit quixotic, he seems to have a dash of Pound (although he lacks the courage to go as ridiculously far as Pound later went in writing the *Cantos*, wherein one is subjected to reading the most execrable prose with the unmistakable saving grace of genuine poetry flashing about once in two pages). Of course, Mardhekar, did not, most probably could not, write longer poems. His staple was the lyric — the sort of beautiful, tubercular lyric that has emerged elsewhere in the last half century. Compactness, precision, a fine sense of rhythm, and a genuine tone were the salient and sustaining qualities of these lyrics. And a Lafourgian irony, tinged with sadness, ran through many of his poems.

Mardhekar is very difficult to translate. Although many of his critics maintain that his is a foreign language, none of his

translators will deny that he is Marathi to the extent of being untranslatable. At this point, we could proceed straight into the heart of the matter — the consciousness Mardhekar's poetry communicates.

Communication is a key word in the entire discussion that follows. It is, in fact, the crux of the matter. Mardhekar obviously was not the inventor of poetic obscurity, but he is certainly the one Marathi poet in the last fifty years who has been most persistently accused of writing a closed-circuit poetry, clouded by obscurity, and having a limited communicability — or to be very exact, a limited readership. This is not unusual to genuine readers of poetry, and is certainly something quite familiar to readers of modern poetry anywhere. This obscurity is not generally the obscurity of the finest nuances of poetry as we find in Dante, Dnyaneshwara, Tukaram, Shakespeare, Donne or Blake. Mardhekar is obscure also in this really creative, visionary sense of the term, but to a relatively small extent. His obscurity to which readers objected so vehemently is the obscurity arising out of a specific communication-technique based on his private poetics — something which every modern poet since Baudelaire has proudly evolved as his trade secret. It is the obscurity created defiantly, and defensively, out of a basic feeling of insecurity in the face of hackneyed techniques of communication. It is that same type of obscurity which Hopkins rather overconsciously developed as a poetic-self-defence. Further, it is like the obscurity of the Eliot who wrote the *Waste Land,* the poet who wanted to be specific and exact to the maximum possible extent. It is also similar to the obscurity of that supreme psychological realist, Joyce, who refused to manufacture an artificial literary style in preference to the real, raw, verbal surface of consciousness.

Mardhekar's obscurity, then, is the very familiar obscurity of modern poetry in general. In fact, it is obscurity only till we reach the point where we grasp the grammar of the poet's individual consciousness, the idiosyncrasies and distinctions of his creative process. Like the surrealists who cropped up all over the European continent between the two World Wars, Mardhekar plumbed images out of a Freudian underworld, and strung them together. But there the similarity ends. Mardhekar never followed free-association or the technique of automatic writing.

He strung the images together with the thread of poetic purpose, as he himself knew it. He used the techniques of music or at least a quasi-musical technique. The oriental linearity was there, the fine melodic line of feeling which is the distinguishing feature of lyric poetry. But he went farther than other modern Marathi poets had dared. He followed Western music and used counterpoint most intriguingly to make two processes of consciousness sound simultaneously, which again would remind one of the *Waste Land*. However, in short poems such as Mardhekar wrote this was extremely difficult; and the results are striking, sometimes beautifully striking, and always very interesting.

These structural qualities of his poems, this fluidity and the mercurial changes in feeling and tone, this orchestral use of evocative words and images, appears to be in direct contrast with the thematic material of his poems.

Throughout *Some Poems* and intermittently in *Some More Poems* one gets the feeling that one is trapped and enclosed in a death-chamber from which there is no escape. This is a sort of existentialist position, although existentialism today could mean several different things. Broadly speaking, it stems from an acute awareness of the predicament of a human individual in the modern world. Superficially, Mardhekar's world can be easily branded as the post-war world, because he refers and alludes to several aspects of war, mass murder, the atomic bomb, and the meaninglessness of *both* human existence *and* its destruction. Superficially, too, one can easily brand his constant sinister cracks at a mechanical sex-life as a metaphorical criticism of 20th century morals. But this is not so. The trap is absolute and eternal. The concern which Mardhekar feels is therefore religious, not socio-moral, or socio-cultural. He sees the world as a mysteriously and hauntedly beautiful place. I think this is very Baudelairian. But he cannot place man, the sinner, in it. A curious admixture of Hindu metaphysics and Christian theology thus pervades Mardhekar's thinking. Mardhekar therefore specializes in a tone of regret, of infinite sadness, and often, hopefully, of relentless yearning. In two of his most memorable lines, and unfortunately, I have to translate, he says:

> "Sadness has eyes of poison
> But, only made of glass;"

and elsewhere,

> "To live a little, then to die,
> All during a wink;
>
> Through darkness the radar's
> Ray bruises onward."

He talks continuously of the terror of realizing that one is alive; he talks of human plight and misery alternately with compassion and condescension; in a poem addressed to God, he says,

> "Although I've cursed you so much
> To your feet I come crawling"

and of God he speaks with the same religious sincerity as that of Hopkins (though his tone is closer to the tone of Hopkins' *Terrible Sonnets* than that of the early Hopkins.).

Mardhekar's curious and whimsical argument with tradition in poetry has these qualities, which are also expressed in his technique: he quarrels with the recent Marathi poetry by writing in an obstinately 17th century idiom — the idiom of Tukaram — Maharashtra's greatest poet. He reconciles again with the recent Marathi poetry by writing poems embarrassingly in the vein of later Victorian English poets, or by even imitating the early Romantics who have deeply influenced the modern Marathi lyric. He quarrels with set norms of poetic structure by inventing two-line stanzas which come to sudden halts and stops, and jerk into a cross-pattern of another feeling, thought, stream of consciousness, or emotion. Yet the verse form he is terribly indulgent with is the *padakulaka* — to write and speak which you have to deviate from living Marathi speech almost to the point of making your expression seem insincere. The verse forms of the traditional *ovis* and *abhangas* are also used by him — and they are natural to Marathi speech — but only when he writes these traditional verse forms does he freely use English words and bastardized phrases. There is intention behind some of these paradoxes but many of them are just inexplicable poetic indiscretions. Sometimes one even feels that many of the poems have been written by a literal follower of Eliot: particularly one who has been tremendously influenced by Eliot *the literary critic.*

P. S. Rege's Quiet Achievement

P. S. Rege's career has been the longest and the quietest among the four. His poems, which continue to appeal to younger poets even today, do not shock the reader in any way. This, in modern times, is a quality rarely associated with major poets. Rege's work has hardly ever caused a major critical controversy. In fact, his poems thematically belong to the tradition of Hindu mystical-erotic poetry. It is only his subtle and varied verse-technique that begins to reveal his modernity. In the case of the other three poets, it is not so. Manmohan Natu, whose imagination is often barbaric and uncontrolled, was the poet who discovered a kind of surrealism on his own: and his weird imagery, arranged in a charged automatic sequence, precipitates extreme reactions among the readers. Mardhekar, whose influence on poetry has been *critical,* is a poet who attacked several literary taboos, caused a revolution in Marathi literary taste (much in the same way as T. S. Eliot did in the case of Anglo-American poetry) by combining a reinvention of the tradition with the discovery of a pan-literary contemporary climate. Muktibodh, a Marxist, who combined marked surrealistic traits with a rhetoric also provoked strong reactions. Only P. S. Rege, almost with a determined conscience, avoided the moral agony of his contemporaries and chose to work on the timeless theme of eros. *They Asked Me* — is a poem which accurately expresses his whole attitude: this poem appears in the text, and therefore I shall not quote it.

It is hardly surprising that Rege's poems do not convey the fury and the anguish of his other contemporaries who dealt with and belonged to 'a tired, struggling, disillusioned world'. Rege's poetry is a poetry of harmony, not of discord. In love he discovers the timeless symbols for this harmony, in love again he finds the mystical solace that the tired, struggling, disillusioned world has lost. Rege can write with an almost classical power and control of the world of primordial urges, the elemental beauty of instinct conceived as a mystical *elan*: I am referring to his poem *Sun.* -

Its hard and brilliant, earthy and elemental imagery; the dynamic and simple presentation of a single central motif; the return to the primal and sanguine world of instinct in its original

dimension of mysterious power – all this connects Rege's poetry not only to the world of Vedic songs and hymns, but also to those sanguine and primary-coloured elements in modern Spanish poetry from Lorca to Neruda. But Rege's strength is drawn from traditional Hindu literature, and often gives a feeling similar to the feeling produced by the erotic sculpture in Hindu temples: melodic fineness combined with sensuous power. It also gives the same sense of mystery which gives the sexual symbols a *cosmological* significance.

Rege's vision of life is firmly anchored in a mystical concept of love – both erotic and emotional. In this he finds a constant within the eternal variables of human life and the endless pantomime of history. This love is not merely sensuous; if it were, it could not give a powerful sense of significance, and a serene reassurance of self-realization in such varied tones, and with such articulate grace, as we witness in his *Radha*. Rege has successfully probed the Hindu psyche to discover archetypal metaphors for erotic love. He has almost avoided any other theme. But over the three decades his career spans, he has gradually gained an inner certainty of technique through continuous experimentation which is not merely a formal exercise but is, in fact, a deeper realization of his thematic material.

Along with Anil, another poet who began writing in the thirties, Rege was a pioneer *vers librist*. Now it is obvious that writing *verse libre* has no poetic significance in itself. It is also obvious that the pioneer *verse librists* in all languages faced different problems of functional versification since each system of prosody has its own rigid (and pliant) characteristics. Free verse in English and *verse libre* in French were technical discoveries that produced unique results in each language. But the necessity for free verse was not, for Rege, a need for superficial formal renovation. He may have borrowed the concept from English poetry which had borrowed it from French poetry. But his necessity was an *aesthetic necessity,* demanded by his own poetic sensibility. Rege has a fine sense of music, and his earlier sensitive use of the cadenced phrase in a fluid metrical pattern predicted his later metrical innovations. He broke away from the Sanskrit-based classical metrics used by his predecessors, gradually going back to the freer cadenced verse of the saint poets, but never using their metrical structures straight. Rege

is a gifted verse-technician like Ezra Pound. He justifies the rhythmical liberties he takes by achieving maximum resonance with a combination of assonance with dissonance, and often creates music which derives its subtle effects through irregularities offset by very flexible rhythms. However, this is irrelevant in a discussion of the translations of his poems, which cannot achieve the musical excellence of the originals.

Turning from Rege's poems to the poems of Manmohan Natu is quite a bewildering experience. It is so because Manmohan's best writing is automatic, the product of a surrealistic imagination, often chaotic, but full of evocative power.

A "Bad" Major Poet

Manmohan's reputation is also uneven. Many responsible critics think he is a charlatan. Others regard him as the most original poet of the forties — raw, uncouth, but brilliant. His best-known work is *The Fellow Travellers of Ages,* a long poem of epic perspective, published in 1946. This poem, parts of which appear in this book in English translation, has the base of a narrative. It tells a story set in the period of pre-Independence religious riots in India. It is an imaginative autobiographical account of a Hindu Brahmin from Poona who is lynched in the Moslem quarter of Bombay by an angry mob. The narration begins, in first person, at the point of murder, and after a description of the murder, the narrator describes his journey to heaven, where he accidentally meets his murderer who himself has been the victim of a Hindu mob. The two fellow-travellers journey to Paradise, and are sent back to the earth to be born again: the Moslem is sent to a Brahmin family, and the Hindu gets Moslem parents. (Manmohan is always fascinated by the weird: in one of his short stories, a man is drowned in a tank of sulphuric acid, and dissolves layer by layer, until his body dissolves completely and his consciousness becomes pure and free). Although parts of this poem are rather naive, it is on the whole a powerful and original piece of writing. The wild surrealistic imagery makes the fantasy psychologically plausible and aesthetically organic. As the longest modern poem in Marathi, it also offers certain poetic qualities which are absent in smaller poems.

Like P. S. Rege, Mardhekar, and Muktibodh, Manmohan has a remarkable influencing power even today, although all these poets were essentially poets of the forties.

Here is a peculiar example of the affinity of his method with the surrealists: I quote from my translation of a passage from the murder-sequence from the *The Fellow-Travellers of Ages*:

Knife! My guts shivered, quietness within
The belly was rocked like water within a coconut.
The knife flashed before my eyes again . . . .
Bright scarf around the neck, jackets,
Dirty tight trousers . . .

Danced hideously like mythological demons
The monster of fear gripped my bare neck . . .
Destiny was splintered like the glass of a lantern
Bursting out in sudden flames . . .
The chest shivered like the beaten skin of a drum . . .

I saw a paper-wheel burning out in the air . . .
A restless glass thermometer in a hot armpit . . .
The double-edged blade went up in the air again . . .
High up . . . tall . . . Knife . . . Jackfruit . . . fruit-flesh . . .
Knife . . . Oh Lord . . .

A blade in the heap . . . High up the dry fruit . . .
blade. . . milk . . . red . . . what . . .
The coil of a monstrous python . . . came down. . . I saw . . .
Lightning flashed, lashed out . . . thundered . .
blundered . . . the inside . . . the outside . . .
Where should I run? How should I kill . . . ? Oh my
soul . . . why did you arrive?

Note the uninhibited use of free association of images in the above passage, or consider the surrealistic use of the metaphor below:

Murderous headlights of eyes . . . bold, confronting me.
Bloody veins standing on the eyeballs . . . like words
on the blotting-paper . . .

The darkness recovered from vast light.
I, a goldfish trapped, in such
A brown dragnet of clouds.*

I have reproduced this rather long extract from Manhoman's famous poem to reveal both its strength and weaknesses. The weaknesses are more obvious. Manmohan has a remarkable sense of language but he is extremely careless and cannot sustain his verbal grip on the unfolding matter. Too many broken statements mar the effect of the occasional splinters of brilliant images. He is often very prosaic and atrociously rhetorical. The whole poem needs ruthless editing (even the long passages I have reproduced lapse into meaningless ramble which is not even phonetically effective). However, I still regard this monstrosity as a poem of major importance because it completely defies the conventional notions of poetic form and yet (or perhaps therefore) contains some startling and functional (as against formal) poetic effects.

All of which is typical of dadaism and surrealism at its beastly best. It is feeling liberating itself from rational notions of order: it is a barbaric orgy of free imagination. No other Marathi poet in the last seventy years has gone to such extremes in his poetic experiment.

Arun Kolatkar:

If Manmohan's surrealistic adventure is a Dionysiac orgy of imagination, Arun Kolatkar's surrealistic experiment is an exercise in catharsis. In Kolatkar's "Black Poems" the imagery is propelled by psychological tensions. The nightmarish treatment of the coital motif in his sex poems which appear in the following pages has a Freudian character. This is blended with an expressionistic technique in his later poems where the psychological fear of sex and life is transformed into enigmatic variations on a metaphysical theme. Kolatkar is always apt to become esoteric and cryptic. He suppresses feeling through a symbol or an image. There is a certain inner violence in this. Kolatkar feels a strange attraction for the sinister. In fact it is almost a Kafkaesque mania. He is obsessed with sex, death,

* These quotations are a variation on my translation appearing in the text.

disintegration, and the strangeness of living things. Sometimes, but not quite often, he can resolve these tensions and achieve the lyrical freedom so typical of the traditional saint poets. I am sure the reader will find him a most enigmatic poet. In my estimation, Kolatkar is a greater poet than Mardhekar although this is not generally accepted. In any case, his breakthrough is something remarkable and uniquely individual even in the wider, contemporary pan-literary context. This may be the reason why some critics find him unacceptable.

His recent poems break away sharply from what I described a little earlier. *Three Cups of Tea* and *Irani Restaurant, Bombay* are symptomatic of this break. The former, in its original 'Marathi' version, is written in 'Bombay Hindi' the local slang used in the Bombay underworld. (Kolatkar's own English version uses American slang very effectively I think). It is the confession of a "bum" in three parts. The first part is a statement on the boss-servant relationship. The second part tells the story of a man's frustrated attempt at seducing his sister-in-law and the resultant quarrel with his own brother ready to shoot him 'for the sake of a bloody cunt'. The third part narrates how an unemployed man flees to Burma and is arrested by the police in Manipur for having no passport. In reply to the policemen's question, he answers, as if addressing every Indian, "What's there in India?" The poem has a telling moral and emotional force. If it were not anti-poetic and anti-literary in style it could not have been so ruthlessly effective. But the real point is that its content too is extremely non-poetic in a formal sense. It uses a fragment of a real-life-like piece of a monologue, and it is the monologue of a 'low' character. In a sense, this 'poem' is a denial of poetry itself: the *bourgeois academic-formalist poetry*.

The latter poem has a different sort of significance. It attempts very successfully to transform a familiar 'place' in the city of Bombay into an elemental symbol. Kolatkar's metaphysical leanings are seen here in a new form. He transforms the ordinary Irani Restaurant in Bombay into a cosmological image. The metaphor unfolds with deadly implications. Apart from its intrinsic merit, this poem is significant because of its stoic, functional form: it 'happens' in the everyday world and is free from any Romantic sentimental involvement.

The Present Trends:

This is characteristic of Marathi poetry in the sixties. The actual swing in this direction began, however, in the mid-fifties when the mimeographed monthly magazine of Poetry, *Shabda,* appeared. Ramesh Samartha, Bandu Waze, Arun Kolatkar, and I were the founders of this magazine. Arun Kolatkar was the leading light. The unique thing about *Shabda* was that it had no manifesto and the poetic spectrum it presented was really wide. It continued erratically between 1955 and 1956, was restarted in 1960, after which it ceased to be published. Later, a similar magazine *Atharva* was started by Asoka Shahane. It flopped after one issue. Shahane today publishes *Aso* from Poona, and it has been running for about two years. *Aso* however *has* a manifesto, and Shahane claims consanguinity with his American friend Allen Ginsberg, the roving beatnik sanyasi, and the "Hungry Generation" in Bengal. The "movement" as a "movement" is as absurd as any organized movement in literature. As expected, the real luminaries are followed by paler intellects and sensibilities until a new set of conditioned-reflexes is created, and a new formalism emerges, bringing along its own stagnant vocabulary and modes. I am sure, like the Dadaists, the *Aso* group will mature and dissolve themselves sooner or later. It has, however, published the work of some significant new poets like Raghu Dandavate, Damodar Prabhu, Sudhir Kolatkar and Asoka Shahane. All of these poets have been somewhat influenced by Arun Kolatkar's work. Another interesting poet brought to light by the earlier *Shabda* is Manohar Oak who writes a kind of automatic poetry, complex but rather loose in structure.

Poetry and Political Commitment:

On the other hand there is Narayan Surve, a young communist poet (obviously politically committed) who has a certain raw and fresh power. Unfortunately, like Muktiboth, Surve will eventually be forced to choose between moral and political commitment which he already tends to confuse. The danger inherent in this would be hazardous to a poet writing in the present Indian cultural, social, and political situation. A poetry addressed directly to a literate and necessarily bourgeois public will create problems for such a poet "ideologically". On the

other hand, a poetry addressed to the masses directly will become at best, only a part of a political persuasion industry. To use political ideology with a sense of moral force is something which takes a poet of Mayakovsky's or Neruda's calibre. And these two poets began first with a poetic commitment, a broad and intense concern for *life*, which often reveals deviations from doctrinaire party-lines in subtle ways. In any case, the immediate poem supersedes the incidental political dogma unless the poem is satirical, rhetorical, or didactic. Surve has to beware of Muktibodh's folly: a confusion between moral and political commitment, and a conflict between poetic immediacy and the shallower delights of the extrovert rhetorician.

However, I suppose, every ambitious poet will have to face the problem of commitment, of existential integrity. Fully realized, it will give the poet's work an organic unity as well as a powerful and natural multivalence of meaning. In the present situation this poses a fascinating series of fatal hazards and no one seems to know exactly how, avoiding both an ivory-tower academicism and a street-corner rhetoric, one can create a valid new kind of poetry. I think this is a world-wide situation. Any contemporary Marathi poet who can forge a way out of this will have found himself an important place in contemporary pan-poetry. His reputation will not be limited to academic circles (which is the case, unfortunately, with most poets today) and will not be the product of his assessment by 'classy' critics. Today the poet needs to regain his living place in human society without compromising with his inner spiritual drive. I do not know how this may happen, but hope it will. Such a functional poetry is already being discovered elsewhere.

PART III : *Notes on the Selection of Poems*

Since my basic assumption has been that anything creative challenges, nullifies, and annhilates all previous moulds of consciousness to an appreciable extent, creative poetry not only breaks away from the semantic habits of the tradition but also describes a change in the function of poetic consciousness which is a deeper and much more significant shift than the shift in external language-perspectives. For, usually, the emergence of a new speech-rhythm, the slightest seismographic shock recorded by syntax and the choice of vocabulary, the emergence of fresh images — in fact, all changes in the palpable surface of poetry — are results of a revolutionary structural upheaval deep within the creative poet's personality. I therefore sense the beginning of a new epoch in poetry whenever speech (in poetry) shows a change in the personality and functioning of a society itself. This change is gradual during the maturing of a generation, and drastic when a new generation bursts forth.

However, I must make a qualification here. Truly major poets achieve true majority and individuality by a directed act of will, and not merely by breaking away from previous modes of consciousness. They achieve an expansion of consciousness, inconceivable to any other individual, either preceding them or existing at the same time. This will always make a major poet obscure to most readers because he has, in creating something new, also found a new, unknown function for his personality. The new appeals or repels, but the unknown terrifies and crystallizes a reaction which cannot be easily diagnosed, absorbed into, or dispelled out of the reader's personality. Readers fear unfamiliar poetry because it suddenly expands and releases consciousness— throwing their solidly fixed world-view and habits of mind into a new, unidentifiable outer space, where their personalities become weightless and meaningless for a while. Has any poet achieved this sort of an impact on his readers during the period we have before us here? If so, by all means he is a significant poet, who is worth representing in greater detail than any other

poets merely "at our disposal". In Marathi, we have had Manmohan, Mardhekar, and Arun Kolatkar during the last twenty years. These poets are major by my standards. They have hit upon the new and crashed into the unknown, annhilating in the process the habitual poetics of past generations. They have discovered new functions for poetry and entirely self-discovered routes and processess to arrive at it. If it is true that poetry is a living and organic form of creation – a form of consciousness poised on a living tension, pitched past the pitch of all previous experience – then it should be obvious that only such poets as those who make us face a consciousness which neither they themselves nor we have ever faced before, are truly major poets. They begin an epoch.

Of course, in discussing functional poetic structure as the main result of this entire creative activity, we cannot ignore those poets who make only an imperceptible impact on the "average" reader of poetry (who cannot escape the hair-raising aesthetic 'horror-show' poets like Mardhekar and Kolatkar confront him with.) . I have in mind the poetry of P. S. Rege here, whose themes in general do not 'shock' the reader into a new consciousness. Rege writes on the age-old themes of love and sensual delight, working on the finest shades of feeling, suggesting and hinting new meanings almost on the boundaries of the imperceptible, instead of making a break-through into totally unfamiliar, unique, individual experiences with violence and verbal savagery. Rege is not the sort of virgin-saint driven by near-religious fury towards the central problem of existence. He is the mystic and the sensualist, who seeks exquisite surfaces – verbal subtleties and ambiguities which suddenly but quietly yield shades of unsuspected meanings in generically 'familiar' experiences. And yet, Rege's impact on the Marathi poetry of this period has been great. Poets like Rege too are major poets even if their poetry is confined to the romantic-symbolist mode, which is becoming an archaism ever since Rimbaud began to be read – and the ethical drive of the modern poet made purely aesthetic adventures seem pale pre-occupations of vacant bourgeois minds. Death of the pure lyric has been overdue long enough – because the themes and the material of the lyric never challenge the basis of past experience. The lyric conventionally dwells on non-dramatic feelings, a single

mood, and has the sort of pill-like sedative charm which we all seek in moments we confess to be our weakest. But that only makes further achievement in lyric poetry a daring thing to try and a near-impossible thing to perform. Rege is thoroughly modern in spite of his life-long attachment to Li-Po like little lyrics and line-poems (like line-drawings) which reveal a sense of music and precision of feeling that stand out distinctly against this violent poetry of his two major contemporaries, as much as they stand out distinctly from the merely aphrodisiac erotic love-poems written by his predecessors.

In my selection, I have laid great emphasis on the work of only five or six poets who have made important contributions to Marathi poetry during the past twenty years. I have resisted the temptation of not including my own work because that would have made this anthology incomplete. In trying to seem humble or polite or objective, I would have betrayed my convictions about poetry and my critical faculty, as well as whatever notoriety or reputation I have, if I had excluded my own work.

The final selection has been made by weeding out only what in translation seemed either awkward and un-English *to the extent of being incomprehensible to the reader.* The last test of any translation is that it must stand on its own, free from irritating notes and pedantic appendices or introductions which only murder the reader heartlessly and slowly. Yet, I have taken many liberties with Anglo-Saxon poetic and linguistic norms, wherever I felt I could justify them.

To sum up, I have made the year 1945 a *valid* starting point by assuming that the end of World War II made a tremendous impact on Marathi literature because it seems to have helped to change many attitudes and values cherished by Maharashtrian society for a long time. I have also in mind major factors revolutionizing the mental life of the intelligentsia, such as the advent of paperbacks immediately following the war, and the influx of foreign literature on an unprecedented scale. The world shrank greatly during and after the war, joining us vitally with our contemporaries in other countries near and far. A whole new vocabulary was suddenly unleashed by the war. New meanings and contexts were created. Ideas were destroyed and re-created. The concepts of morality and human relationships, the values

of human life, were completely revolutionized. The meaningless and the meaningful in life found a vast number and range of new correlatives. All of this has gone into the making of poetry, because it has affected all the processes of our minds.

Most of all, the isolation of human beings, the extreme individualism that causes and is a result of a suffering that is imposed or stimulated by world-forces beyond individual control, is something which marks this age. Again, in this age, we begin seeing the re-emergence of a religious concern for existence which suddenly makes Buddhism sprout in as inconceivably Unbuddhistic a place as San Francisco, and makes Marathi poets turn back to the great poetry of Tukaram who wrote more than three centuries ago. Little magazines in Marathi publish the work of Allen Ginsberg and Le Roi Jones in translation. People read a Chilean poet like Pablo Neruda – an elder contemporary – and discover living affinities. Poetry is influenced by films, music, painting and even theology and nuclear physics. All kinds of knowledge and experience are thrown up into the poetic mix. Absurdly, but without the slightest inner contradiction, one pursues Rilke and Rimbaud, Henry Miller and Kafka, spiritualism and technology, a fantastic conglomeration of clashing realities and visions, facts and legends, bombs and silences, forecasts and histories, speculations and imminence, calamities and creations – a living confusion striving towards an impeccable physical balance – the supreme violence and the central quietness of poetry.

I must thank all the people without whose help, assistance and guidance I could not have completed the task of compiling this anthology. My wife Vijaya has always been an acute critic of my work, and her comments have proved useful. I am grateful to Professor A. B. Shah for his patience and encouragement throughout the last three years. My friend Professor K. Shri Kumar has gone through the MSS and given me some invaluable suggestions. I am grateful to my friends Toni Diniz and Vijay Sinha for their enthusiastic co-operation, and to Mr Nissim Ezekiel for his expert criticism of the MSS. I am also grateful to Arun Kolatkar, Indrasen Jayakar, Kumud Mehta and P. S. Rege for their translations and enlightening comments. Finally, I am deeply grateful to the poets (or their successors) for allowing

me to use their work. I know that despite all this able help from these friends I have relied heavily upon myself. This reliance accounts for all the sins of ommission and commission this book may be suffering from. This self-reliance also accounts for the large number of doubtful and hazardous exercises in translation, which are mine. I regret the fact that I could not include poems by Asoka Shahane, Mangesh Padgaonkar and Raghu Dandavate for reasons beyond my control.

Bombay,
15th June, 1966 — DILIP CHITRE

Sun

The Sun
Is my Lord,
My patron;
He makes me
Robust, virile,
Like the bold bull
The sire in the herds of the Aryans—
Smouldering.

Fluid,
His effulgent energy
Fulminates
In my veins—
Where blood
Within blood is churled,
The bounds
Of pubescent mind
Burst.

My Sun
Becomes the eye,
To stir up and drink
The cold, black globe
In your eye's sky.

And my Sun
Gives me hands
Hands
Of pointed lances
Out of the pores of my skin,
Aimed
At the feast
On your breasts
Sparkling again
With fresh
Stars of dew.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Losing

Just because something was said,
I did go and ransack my head;
Just because something was said,
I did go and lose my head.

> But can the wind's all ten directions
> Be really free?
> Only the mind's first five peelings
> Lend themselves to counting.

Now I am wisened to this –
Even if anything was said:
I didn't go and ransack my head;
I didn't go and lose my head.

Translated by the poet in collaboration with Kumud Mehta

Song

The song that the bird sings in the tree
Has another tree again in the song
That the bird in the tree sings.

In the tree the song that the bird sings
Has again another bird in the song
That in the tree the bird sings.

Translated by the poet

Working

Patience?
Why, of course, but until he comes.
Then everything you must cast away.
He will demand nothing.
His working you have to seek
In sky's weaving,
In clear water trickling.

To someone like you,
Do you know what it was he said?
I am yours, yours,
Yours.
By rote, this he never recited.
And yet to you too this is just what will be said.

Translated by Kumud Mehta

Firstness

Dust flies in instants
Eyes they cannot see.
Therefore, I repeat
Tidy things up, lady, wait for me:

Far, far from over
Wind's impetuous haste,
I only repeat what I can tell –
After here there is nowhere.

Steady, even more steady.
Their's the hustle; just us, all said and done.
I insist,
Let it stay awhile, our firstness without reason.

Translated by Kumud Mehta

Intention

There was no intention as such, initially,
Merely the distance of a latish dawn,
The junction of crimson and random words,
And like Narcissus, for no rhyme or reason,
Seeing into the eyes, looking into them.

Now the distance is almost into the fist,
And the dawn is alert,
Here, there.

Translated by Kumud Mehta

Radha

The blue sky is Hari;
And the lone star Radha –
Tremulous,
She is the heart's longing from age to age.

The wide earth is Govinda;
And the rice-field Radha –
Ever-fruitful,
She is the sweet-speaking one from age to age.

The still river is Krishna;
And the wood leaning on its bank Radha –
Question-less,
She is the eternal repose from age to age.

Translated by the poet

Dawn

And when it is dawn,
Will you hide him in your heart?
"That heart is no longer with me;
I shall spread my tousled hair
Gently over him."

But will he be safe and sound, my dear,
So surrounded?
"Oh no!
He doesn't know a thing:
Only a fire rages in his heart."

And he needs you to quench the flame?
"How can I tell?
When he is here, I don't care to think;
When he is away, no other thought touches me."

Why then this hurry, my dear, to hide him
When suddenly it is dawn?
"Oh, no! There's no hurry at all.
Only I make the night a little longer
Spreading my tousled hair
Gently over him."

Translated by the poet

Song

I caress the sky with hands of trees
And this your dear face with hands of mine;

Entice with lips of earth the still lake's water
And the hesitant songs in thine eyes.

Translated by the poet

Beauty

What right has such beauty to be?
It should glow in the mind's eye alone,
And burning, shape a perfect image
out of blackest stone and the frozen word:
Stone, sleeping sluggishly through aeons
in the womb of the earth;
Word, frozen in the depth of the heart
with only its context remaining.

This chisel of mine has a hungry edge;
My word a warm meaning.
Oh, foolish one, how shall I tell thee?

Translated by the poet

Dream

I think I must have dozed off for a little while;
For, when I woke up you had come and gone.
Only a few flowers remained –
Flowers which could not even say who they were...
And a vague soft fragrance in the air.

Tonight I must dream a longer dream
So that the flowers will talk
And their fragrance stretch a tremulous bridge
Between you and me.

Translated by the poet

There I Saw the Earth

There
Where astonishing birds shine
On the sky's shawl;
And suddenly
Through the entire still row of trees
A single wave of the wind shakes the leaves
Throbbing, it passes on somewhere beyond;

Within the distance of a call
In the prismatic clarity of the lake
Blue-white buds at the edge——
A little clasping, a little opening up;
And long shadows;
Absently
Stretch
On the path of darkness——

There
For the first time I saw the earth
Of the night...
Sad, innocent,
Not once outstretching her body in moonlight,
Flowering alone in the secret darkness of her
own mind.

There——
The dotted
Faint, blushing, grass-born, dew-eyed flowers
Gave themselves up with ease to me;
And all the paths from the vast plain
Oblivious of their own alienness
Flowed in from all directions like the veins of a song;
Where, touching the body of the bud,
The wind lost its boisterous element,
The world celebrated its worldliness——

There——
The first time I saw the earth

Of the dawn
Unexpected, uninitiated, seductive, drenched,
Putting its inexplicable seal on the mind.

There——
Standing aside alone in silence
The red-combed *pangara* tree,
Sizing up my eager mind;
And the wind fanning
The deadly white fire of the sky defying my gaze;
Where each day I shed my own skin
And become a new cobra——

There——
I first saw the earth, earth
Of the meridian sun...
Elemental, broad,
Burning herself for everyone's sake,
The earth I had loved
Since even before I understood her,
Kept her alive.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Protector

At the very enlightened moment when all grows dark
I am my own protector;
My unusual hand is at an alien veil
Beyond which lies everything beautiful;

At the innermost depth is the monolithic heart
And I do not fear it;
There is, too, the murmuring molecule of a prayer
Addressed to the good mind unknown.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Meaning

And seated,
When you take her by the hand
Never measure the distance.
Time has a strange habit of turning back....
Look merely into the distance westwards....
Watch how even the cloud's shadows have a colouring,
Ask nothing, say nothing.
There where the grated sand lies below
Let your fingers travel...

From here all queries have a meaning.

Translated by Kumud Mehta

Traces

There is a pathway,
With no trace of footfalls – one, two, three.....
And you in full view again.

This is a new style of visitation
To arrive and remain
As of old in self-custody.

But I must be wary of company,
Since, for all these years,
I am, as I used to be, unrequited –

You, as you always were, indifferent.

Translated by Kumud Mehta

Steel

On her lips
Of arrogant steel
When once the blue lotus blooms,
On one of its explicit petals
The pin-point drop of blood
You see ——
That's mine

That's my festival...
Go tell her
Beyond the solid barriers of steel.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Thanks for This Patch of Colour

Thanks
For this patch of colour –
Deflecting,
Retrieving the walls
Of drab houses
From utter collapse
– This patch of colour.

Its fresh moisture
Touches the eyes
In which the mauve
Blush begins a dance,
A strange scandal
Foliates...
And then the bland and sober
Houses all around
Aren't left with the semblance of a shadow

Throughout
Just thunders
A continuous canvas of delight.

Thanks . . . thanks
For this patch of colour.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

The Trees Know Everything

the trees know everything:
when will the rain drench,
the sun arrest,
the wind give a call;
like I do
waiting for you
here
from the ruffled East
to the turning maniacally vast wide
horizon in the West.

and adamant
— (striking roots into roots I) —
tight against the camphor night
blood blood a hundred thousand flowers
in my limbs

only for you
for ——
—— only you.

the trees know everything.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

The Birch Tree

This birch tree
Which stands erect,
Tall and beautiful,
Mottled and mysterious
In the midst of other birch trees,
Equally tall and beautiful,
Mottled and mysterious —
was it here before
A hundred, two hundred, five hundred years ago?
Will it be here again
A hundred, two hundred, five hundred years hence?

Certainly not.
And yet there was a birch tree here
Same as this one
Erect, tall and beautiful,
Mottled and mysterious
A hundred, two hundred, five hundred years ago;
And there will be here again a birch tree
Same as this one
(Some tree a little better than this one)
Erect, tall and beautiful,
Mottled and mysterious
A hundred, two hundred, five hundred years hence.

I was not here
A hundred, two hundred, five hundred years ago;
Nor will I be here again
A hundred, two hundred, five hundred years hence.
And yet there was someone here
A hundred, two hundred, five hundred years ago —

Someone just like me;
And there will be someone here again
A hundred, two hundred, five hundred years hence —
Some one just like me
(I hope, someone a little better than me).

Today this birch tree
Which stands erect,
Tall and beautiful and mottled before me
In the midst of other birch trees
Equally tall and beautiful and mottled
Has yielded a little of its mystery to me,
And I have shared my new mystery with it,
My joy and longings,
Which make our life as one.

Translated by the poet

Ajanta

February 1967

The endless orange refrain of sequestered fields of *tur;*
By their side the blossoming mangoes –
Each a separate *stupa.*

Occasionally,
The mind taking in a lake-form in the distant blue.

That brief vision revealed deep in the hill's womb
And out here this deluge from the mounting sun.

Translated by the poet

Night, Such As This

Night, such as this
Comes madly saying all manner of things.

Once again
Tracing wanted and unwanted markings.

At times, in places
There is a flutter imprinted on the wind;
Once again,
Heavy shadows cease their yearnings.

Deep down here
My mind is sinking in the water;
And lost
By the bank I am there again myself.

Translated by the poet in collaboration with Kumud Mehta

Hands

You told me then:
Sunlight, rain, wind
Have to be kept in mind.

And yourself, you didn't do this. With hands
Resting in hands, I knew then:
Sides broaden, run wild.

Translated by the poet in collaboration with Kumud Mehta

Badami, Vaisakh 1880

A shade different from the rising sun's reddish
Tinge, frilled with a chocolate shaded yellow
unfolding in places
Such is this fragment

It was in the cave here that the breast
Of a sculptured girl-friend was whole
—— Still hot, still desperate —
And yet from over this high-up place down
below around the pictured lake
Among those what-not greens

Of trees revealing what aspects of green,
the coolness of the *Kalindi* leaves
Is wrapped up lovingly by this piece,
This fragment which plucks again and again
At the mad mindless violet crotch of that mountain once
seen at Khandala.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

MANMOHAN

Terror *

A paper-wheel burning out in mid-air...
A feverish thermometer choked up inside
A hot armpit... Again the knife flashed
Up in the air ... grew tall ... the knife
And the jackfruit, the jackknife ripping
The fruit open... Oh!

High up the dry fruits, a stream
Of milk, a haemorrhage, oh the red!
A terrible python-coil, lowering,
Flashes of lightning, thunderstorms,
My blundering heart stumbling out...
My inside out, run! run! Where?
Hit back! Strike! Hell! How?
O my soul, why did you come here?

What nonsense! Mother! Hey, don't strike!
Oh please, come on now, don't kill!
But that's ridiculous! Daddy, daddy see!
Where am I? How far? What the hell!
See what I mean? What does it mean?
What then... don't you see? What the hell,
then?

Eyelids raised like theatre curtains
Leaving my eyeballs alone in the auditoriums
of fear,
The jaw of a tiger, a stove in flames,
I saw lights in a temple, toppled.
A tall string of lights, slowly burning
Out, in the falling rain.

* From *The Fellow-Travellers of Ages,* lines 94-116.

Slaughter house and slaughter, beyond
Bandra Railway Station . . . The lambs . . .
A four-legged crowd awaiting the guillottine,
The basketful of broilers, the black
Cat on the roof gnawing at stale dried fish.

Covering the romantic book of my lungs
With furious hands, forming a protective
Swastika-jacket . . . I grinned . . . I growled . . .
Dog . . . Tiger . . . Lion . . . I . . . hit my paws
Against the cage-bars of the knife

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Death*

He has cactus eyes, crooked fingernails
He is the ace of spades, the ten of clubs,
The trump of trumps: he's the frayed
Old cloth with untorn borders: the broom:
The rabied dog: the leper blackmailing
Alms out of you: that's death.

He is irrepressible, death, the enemyless;
The great malignant. His equipment
Is pit, shovel, noose, enamel-sink, tears.
He is clocktower-tall, he has clockdial eyes
With two long mucous-yellow hands spelling
time

His hair shoots out like banyan branches:
He is the monstrous black full-stop, the
broken
Hour-glass emptied of sand, the black
Wrestler stanced to grapple with me . . .
Terrified I screamed: "Get out! Go away!"
At the end of all ends, mind spoke to
the body,

* From *The Fellow-Travellers of Ages*, lines 130-149 of the original poem.

"Darling! Look after yourself, us both"
Usman's scarf unfurled death . . . what?

Murderous headlights of eyes, full
Blazing globes confronting me . . .
Bloody veins standing out of them
Like ink from blotted words . . .
Darkness recovered from unceasing light.
I, a trapped goldfish,
In a dense dragnet of brown clouds.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

As I Lay Dying*

Between the conscious and the unconscious
A lonely commuter. The image drifted,
The doodling became prolific and swift . . .
Dams burst, walls tottered, ramparts collapsed . . .
I was a flying kite, half black, half white.
I was a candle burning basewards, melting.

I was a tangled ball of wool, a teacup
With broken handle. A galley collapsed
From the printing machine . . . A bloated bedbug
Pressed between the fingers of an insomaniac.
I was the ace of hearts
Discarded on the gutter's ten of clubs.

I was a miniature Sepoy Mutiny
Peeled open like an orange.
My life hanged upside down before me,
Childhood up, youth down, like a bat.

Threadlike worms in the gutter began
Sniping at me, robbing the prized substance
Of living, 33 years, my goodness !
Memory's creepers and the pumpkins of my years!

Translated by Dilip Chitre

* From *The Fellow-Travellers of Ages*, lines 195-211.

SHARADCHANDRA MUKTIBODH

Aged Words

Aged words!
Useless with erosion like old coins
Bearing strange motifs like ancient memories of the dead
Loose like the yellowed pages of an old book
Very old
These aged words
Pale dreams of extinct ancient worlds
Float
Upon their green eyes almost effaced
Like the bright stain
Of the moon rising through a mist ——
Dim archaic ghosts
Singing a perpendicular song ...
Like tall peaks
Hidden
In the lengthy waves of fog
The life of aged words
Throbs in the dark shadows of long dead worlds...
Blood already dried in their veins
Soul already freed from its coils
These are the skeletal relics
Of a devastated world ——
They labouriously climb
Metrical altitudes
Life
Become a mask for death
Sapless words
Aged words! !

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Now

All fogs have vanished.

The Light touched my trembling hand
And said,
"Let your painful journey
Come to an end!

Now wherever you are is your goal
Now whatever you do is your work

Now you do not need the feeble support of dreams
Now you need not seek a fogbound rainbow

Now truth has shattered your heart
And filled its own music in the cracks

Now your tears shall shed a clear light
And your footprints shall be bold."

Translated by Dilip Chitre

The Solar Age

Vast grief
Wide and deep
Night full of regret
Countless curved shells
Of the black backs
Of cloud-tortoises
Covering
All the lake of the sky

The moon
A yellowed spot
Lewdly and ominously hanging
Like a fat bell of brass
On a tall tree! !

Mournful the wind
Paces to and fro
In a sad and heavy stride

Only intermittently
Its rustling steps
Are heard
Over dry leaves

Griefs
Draped in weeds
With overburdened backs walk
In the horizon's twilight zones
Murmuring in a chorus
Of deep black tones

Stupendous flames of suffering
Shoot up from every atom
Only the breath lingers, one feels
That in this sick body of life
Underneath the layer of a coma
Still deeper
Below the totally destructive

Layers of sickness and death
Fresh streams are still at work
Every moment they are engaged
With the solid black
Heart of death
Penetrating its lithic walls

Some time
This vast chest of death
Shall burst open and
From its massive dam
Billions of strong
Streams of light
Shall fall in terrific cataracts
And water
The dry, wretched, vast, desert
Surface of the Earth

Fresh streams have an intuitive
Knowledge of the Solar Age
Which is ruled
By Absolute Light.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Today, Thirty-Two Winters Are Past

"To fall asleep in one's own character is to be in the anteroom of Death".

—STENDHAL

Today,
Thirty-two winters are past!
...And the chill of winter
Makes every hair on the body stand on its root!
Draw, draw the curtains black,
Let all grow dark,
Let there be a blood-red rose only
In this vase of black clay,
Let there be one mark of my intense desire
On a whole world of dark regret.

My soul shudders
With the chill of thirty-two winters.
Block all the inlets of light
Let me sit draped in the black blanket of solitude,
Let me hide myself from the sting of sunlight,
Seal me up, enclose me, shut me up
Inside the black petals
Of the lotus of memories.
No, no, don't switch even the light on!
Perhaps from the turgid yellow belly of light
The lean, tall, fully clothed figure
Of my last winter will be born
And will press its long bony finger
On the yellowed cushion of light,
And say:
"It's no use now...
It's all over...
Finished!"

Draw, draw the curtains black
Close the opened book.
Let me sleep
In the dark, resting my cheek
On the pillows of old tombs...
Let me be drunk with the poison of regret...

Don't tell anyone that the thirty-second too is over
And that I've passed through the thirty-third door!

It's good to be in this dumb darkness,
It's good to be with your silent shadow,
I'm lonely . . . . oh, I'm so lonely . . .
It's good to immerse myself in warm memories!

Let me dive deep into the black,
Waveless ocean of the subliminal . . .
Deep deep into the underworld, where
The emerald-green forests of thirty-two dense winters
Lean into a crystal pool.
And so many faces float upon its water.
Eyes, eyes, a multitude of sorrowing eyes reflected
in the clear pool!
And a bird hovers over them!
Swoops, flutters . . .
Cries among the trees:
Announcing the return of spring
In the suave notes of mourning
Again, and again, and again . . .
A whispering bird-cry
For spring . . .
And a mischievous, indistinct laughter
Rings, somewhere,
Somewhere someone is laughing,
Somewhere
The green forests of my winters
Are whispering with excited leaves!
Beseechings . . .
Large drops of tears falling . . .
My innermost mind, my most secret being,
Is charged and excited
Is rustling like the deep
Green leaves of thirty-two winters!

The wind slurs, flows, rustles
The wind of memories
Full of regret
Broadcasting cyclonic echoes in the depths!
Anguished,

The mind spasmodically returns
To its stationary point
In the present continuous!

And then I am given a call
Like an outstretched hand,
"Hey, come out, come up for air!
Come up . . . and listen!
Those spinning halos of dreams
That encircle your head
Will not become real
Even in your memories!
– You had asked only for help!
Even while a storm raged in your mind
The walls of your eyes never burst!
You stopped at the threshold
And stretched out your hand
For help!
Your memory has no fulfilment to offer . . .
Even in your memory
There's always been only thirst. . .
"– Come out! Come up for air!
A tree that has not been totally undressed, unleaved,
Tell me, in what season,
Such a tree may bend its boughs
Laden with red leaves,
Heavy with white blossoms?
Which spring may put
Its vermilion initials on such a tree?
–Oh, come out! Come up for air!
The blazing sword of light
Has not passed through your heart yet!
You are not wounded yet!
You have not suffered: yours is not a real anguish!
Be wounded in your innermost depth!
And the wound alone shall be
Your sun and fulfilment'
This is a familiar call
This is the beloved truth of my identity
Tapping softly on the closed door

I come to myself again out of the world and spell
of memories
Again and again I hear the friendly call:
"Be wounded, you!
Be wounded, you!"

I float between the conscious and the unconscious
Like the thick pink morning mist
Between two tall cliffs.

Draw, draw
The curtains black.
Open the windows
Open the doors
Let hot sunlight crowd in
And there will be light!
Your face which has been vague and dim until now
Will be clear and bright
Your face will be distinguished in the light
Stamp it like a burning seal
On your heart!
And give me your real hand of flesh and blood.
Give me your hand which is alive and throbbing.
Give me your hand which has fingers made finer and
longer by feeling.
Give me your hand with its fingers pointed by emotion.
I'll hold it so close to my heart!
...And let your face kiss my sight,
And let me feel the quivering and soulful wrinkles on it
Let me clothe myself in your gaze
Let me be wrapped up in its pure warmth
Let the golden marks of the pleasure-pain of your
company
Be stamped deep upon my heart!
Let me embrace you, hold you tight in my arms,
In the broad light
And let me live
Your world and your mind
Look!
I have rolled up the long shadow I had cast
And am now standing here, trembling

Like a small drop of water
Desperate to get wiped out
Although today
The thirty-second is over . . .

The square of life
Is half black, half white
I am walking along
The line that cuts across
Half my face is flooded by light
The other half is eclipsed, dark
This is my line of destiny
This line that cuts across the square
This is my line of luck
My movement is poised at the dead centre!
On one side
The clouds of ego and memory
Dark and mournful
On the other
The upsurging breakers of light
Lapping up, enveloping.
In between I,
Tossed and pitched like a masthead . . .
Up . . . own . . . Now drowning . . . Now saved
Oh, I'm a Hamlet! Hamlet!
Half of me is a brazen lie, half of me is truth
Half of me is sublime, half of me is low
Half of me is the helpless suffering humanity
And the other half is the fatty ball of ego!

I am dual:
I duel with me.
The world is fogbound like a dream;
The world is closed within itself
Therefore she tears up the love-letter from life
And in the cave of death
Memory bears no child!
Memory bears no child!
. . . . Quick, quick, open all the doors
The vast one is calling me
Stretching out a rough, deformed, big hand

Let my soul torture itself against its vast heart
Let my spirit throb
In time with its heartbeat
. . . Let my heart be shipwrecked
Against the hard reality of the vast expanse of humanity
And in such agony
Let me carve upon myself the eternal wound
Which burns with intense passion
Passion and sacrifice
And beyond the sacrifice
A militant humanness
Fiery and all-embracing
And then . . .
Realization!
Ecstasy!
Joy!
Look
The white hot feet of light
Are already at your door!
Draw, draw the curtains black!
Open the windows and the doors . . .
Lock hand in hands
Come out!
My darling, look . . .
. . . The sun has flashed up
Like a ball of silver;
The vast dome
Is held up in flames;
What a magnificent span
Is this meridian fire!
Beneath it stands
A tree of a million sanguine leaves,
In an outburst of flowers and fire,
Heaving the passionate
Sigh of creation!
Look, look . . .
The flashing silverball sun!
The spring
At the end of thirty-two winters.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

BAL SITARAM MARDHEKER

The Track Says

The track says,
"I myself run"
But the sprinter
Is someone else;
The wind claims,
"In my voice
Huge rocks lie".

In the desert
The palm grows wild
With an itch under its scalp;
The aeroplane
Floats in the sky
Arrogant of its odd stride.

Exploding into cries
THEY claim they have moved
Mountains out of sleep;
Grafting bone upon bone
They grow
A cosmos out of clinics.

Having worshipped stones for God
Now they worship
Humanity through hymns;
As if cultured words could grow
New complexion on the altar!

You have buried the stone,
So, bury bones;
Vermilion has washed out,
So let blood;
With the noose of ignorance

Around your necks
Live and let live.

The world in the tube
Lives in the tube
The chemical only feigns
Its lover's quarrel;
Useless is the cause of humanity
Hollow sound the trumpets of power

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Shiva's Phallus

Shiva's phallus
Is my prick:
This is the secret
Of all anguish:
The two wrestle
In the ring of consciousness.

Both are tough guys:
One, the bodyless Cupid in the body,
The Other, a gesture of the Absolute:
Struggling to knock out each other

One resorts to language,
The Other celebrates his body
In a drunken orgy.
In between, it's me — wretched beggar.

One puts yesterdays on sale,
The Other assures future credit:
I transact my present
In despair.
Just as the wings of an aeroplane
Without fluttering sting the air,

And the air starts
Hollering,
When knowledge and sensuality
Invisibly bite my mind,
My mind starts
Yelling.

Senses should lead towards knowledge:
The knowledge of the Brahman must
yield sensuous pleasure:
Or is, in this world of illusion
The awareness of anguish
Itself an illusion?
This then, shall continue:
The tension between
The short-lived and the eternal:
The dilemma of living creation
Is the foundation of living creation.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Mice in the Wet Barrel Died

mice in the wet barrel died;
their necks dropped, untwisted;

their lips closed with lips;
their necks fell, undesiring.

poor bastards who lived in holes,
in the barrel coughed out their souls;

daylight splashed in their grey eyes
dousing their limbs and their lingam;

life too is a compulsion,
death too is a compulsion.

sadness has poisonous eyes
made, however, of glass;

even the honeycomb
that gathers on the lips
is synthetic!

lips press upon lips;
mice get douched in the wet barrel.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Big Brother Platform

Big brother Platform,
Big brother Platform,
The train arrives,
The train departs;
Big brother Platform,
Here she comes –
But oh!
The signal is down
And there she goes,
– The train is gone!

You sure do have guts,
Big brother Platform,
Big brother Platform;
How many men
Have already trampled
Your heroic chest!

Big brother platform,
Big brother platform,
The train arrives,
The train departs;
Big brother platform,
Here she comes –
But oh!

The signal is down
And there she goes,
—The train is gone!

Big brother Platform,
Did you like the first one,
With a swanky steam-engine?
Or do you prefer this one
This smart, this electric
Snub-nosed live-wire?
How many soles
Of big and small feet,
Tender-skinned,
You've smelt so far!
How many boots
Have kicked you so far
And how you've borne it!
Flat-heeled and flippant
Delicate slippers
Have pressed close to you
So often!
How many rude
Native shoes
Have shown you their spark!

Big brother Platform,
Big brother Platform,
Say something!
The train arrives,
The train departs,
But you neither laugh nor weep,
Each moment you heave
So many goodbyes!

You've seen a lot of 'em:
Mustachioed porters
And clean-shaven ones
Waving the flags!
You've seen so many
Coolies wearing red
And coolies wearing blue!

You've seen the smartest!
Some spat their betel-juice at you;
Some choked up with a loving adieu;
Some sold cigarettes and matches;
Some gave westernized kisses'

Each guard blew the whistle
In a unique style;
Each driver steered the train
In his own way;
But, you Big Brother,
You know the secret of each!

Say something,
Say something,
Big Brother Platform,
The train arrives;
Your heart is full of secrets!
Say something!
The Train is gone:

With what arrogance
And with what proud stride,
Accepting salutes, the "through" train moves,
Up and down, like a queen in her gown!
Did this one impress you
With her flourish and sweep?
Or do you care
For the suburban flirt
Skirting about like a pert?
Or do you like the goods train
Best of all
Loose, and slow, and prolonged,
Stupid, affectionate, and expansive
Like a born housewife?

Big Brother Platform,
Speak out, Speak out!
The mischievous signal
Is turning green;

There goes the train:
Big Brother Platform,
Speak up now, at least!

The signal is mischievous,
The junction innocent;
The track is straight,
The gravel sparkling;
Tell us about them all,
How you lay,
On your ugly black back,
And embraced one;
Big brother platform,
The train's arrived;
Say something;
I shall lie on my back.
The signal is down:
The train is gone.
Big Brother Platform,
Big Brother Platform,
Say something;
The train is gone:
Say something!
Big Brother Platform,
Big Brother Platform,

Translated by Dilip Chitre

If Something in You

forget what happened
and give up dashed hopes;
if something in you is still alive and kicking
seek out the death within.

millions die afresh,
but the funeral rites are the same;
out of their stopped hearts
you hear an anguished laughter
that always lies beyond speech.

they repeat the scales learnt by rote;
use the same old language
with a new faith;
put archaic ideas in novel patterns!
drive old drills in different grooves!

this time at least, forget what happened;
and give up dashed hopes;
even if you stop your ears
your pulse shall continue to beat.

Translated by ***Dilip Chitre***

What Sense Does it Make, Lord

what sense does it make, Lord!
if I pine for you?
how can a cockroach hope
to become a moth?

where saints wait
day and night
flagellating their minds,
what hopes may I entertain,
I, who have fallen short,
And who attempts to grasp
You with a meagre feeling?

What more shall I speak now?
I, who am openly fooled?
And on whose mind
You have registered a dismissal?

Translated by ***Dilip Chitre***

Watch it Mister

Watch it Mister! Whom do you tell
of God!
He is pretentious as an ostrich;
We dry in the sun like mackerel,
And get beaten hard;

Here, life roasts the living well!
Let your Ostrich give out at least
A flatulent after-dinner belch.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Time Gave a Gentle Tap

Time gave a gentle tap
On the head
before I guessed who;
The beam of sublimity giggled
Overhead;
Like a lighthouse
In the middle of the sea.

My thoughts prolonged their yawn
Like a child in a moving train
The sublime beam giggled
At the shining pate.

Hair after hair is lost;
Scratching won't cure the loss!
Soul after soul is passing away
Pining doesn't teach any lesson!

Translated by Dilip Chitre

I am a Wedding-guest

I am a wedding-guest
In my own two-room establishment;
Or, am the son-in-law
On a visit.

Trouble makes my temperature shoot up
No quinine brings the fever down;
The saline wind from the invisible
Blows upon me and stings.

When the bells toll in a faraway temple,
Their ringing ferments as it reaches me;
When I analyse it emotion-wise
My tears are rent open.

The fruits of darkness are rotten
By the mechanism of a night-shift;
When I taste them, the liver of my
sensibility
Gets squeezed by the fever of
inequality.

Lashes of the eyelid of night
Are my gown of starry rays;
But I do not dare to sleep.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

If Your Mind is Blown Up

if your mind is blown up by a blast
cement the gaping holes with fear;
put the ice of civil behaviour
on the bloodstream that runs fast.

the terror of darkness is vast,
the call of darkness is sudden;
seeing such an unsculptured night
your mouth will go dry with fright.
and when you will hear the
whistle
blown from the tower of
desolation;
gulp it down, and remember
this *mantra*
silent, but publicly known:
—*"Let us be frightened together!*
Let us courageously have cold feet!"

Translated by Dilip Chitre

But Flowers Still have a Smell

but flowers still have a smell,
and the soil is still sparkling red;
even now the goat eats leaves
climbing the dwarf stumps.

the sky is scarlet ochre still
and a naked child stands in front;
between the two, even now,
sits a dozing cow.

an earthquake here
and war-drums there;
cries everywhere,
fresh embers on old corpses.

a stone-god surveys
the battles won by him;

man claims that his mind
is eternity's mimeograph.

creating proud, curt, oblique relations
mortal voices flirt with false notes;
someone, who is deaf in the smell of grilled flesh,
sniffs at a symphonic Paradiso.

the annotated journal of man
reads the same as always;
the pulsation is beyond the sky
but it makes these clay-pots clutter.

to live a little, and then to die
all during a wink;
through darkness the radar's
ray bruises onward.

although the mealy sunlight
in December dissects the mind
and makes a nervous incision
to reach the inner wound;

even then, the flowers have a smell,
even then, the red soil sparkles;
climbing the dwarf stumps
even then, the goat eats leaves;

the sky is scarlet ochre
and a naked child stands in front;
even then the cow dozes
between these two!

—*"Aho bat mahadbhagyam drastum
vyavasita vayam"*—

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Gathering in its Wrists

gathering in its wrists
the momentum of moments
memory plucks petals:
as one unravels the secret
of water, loosening its knots,
how many shadows does the
pool show!

heaven heaves its blossoms
in closed eyes;
the fool sails without fear!
the trapped fish is lost
in endless enigmas of reflections!

chains in the petals
arrest ecstasy:
the plastic world of reflections
besieges the established.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

A Forest of Yellow Bamboos

A forest of yellow
Bamboos sings
Underlines of heavens;
Mills
A worldwide cognition
Pledges
To live (but Tomorrow)
In a broadcast.
The staghorns of sexless
Age-old predictions
The lemon tree
Carves in the wind,

From which
Appear
In it
New footprints, but dead.
Innumerable crows dot
The pylons of a hundred centuries;
Verbs on guard
Stand ready
In consciousness:
But, mere robots.
Immovable,
The pole star
Fallen,
Ursus relieved;
Unfrozen
Hail falls,
And on the radio:
Radha-Krishna:
An erotic blare.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

O the Silly Babies are Asleep

O the silly babies are asleep
O the lullaby is become sleepy
At this empty hour
The eyelids of silence grow heavy.

April leans down to look
From a deep blue sky
And the veins of wind
Grow dim in space

In the Beginning the Word
Comes only by God's grace;
Dozing effort wears
A whole world

April licks a mad,
Flat Earth, and passes;
And somewhere very far
A dwarf star blackens.

Now who's afraid of whom!
Let those who fare well, fare well
What choice is there to drive on
In a narrow outrage!

April climbs heaven
On a starry spiral;
And through a cobalt wind
Moves into the cosmos.

What minds below minds
All crazy and crooked;
What sieves beneath sieves
And crudities in thought

O April, please,
Bring May in tomorrow;
But, darling! Why suddenly
Is our moon down?

Oh darling, why, so early
Is our moon down?

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Would that I Forgot Myself

Would that I forgot myself;
Would that I were obssessed only by you;
Would that I gained knowledge
In the precincts of ignorance.

Would that the edges of consciousness
Were smoothed, and some emotional
Fissure were filled.

What smithereens to possess
In a smashed mind, where
Every belonging has betrayed me!

As the child, slapped hard, falters
In speech, so does grief
Beat to a wordless time.

Balance grief within eyeballs, then,
Burn the night to ashes;
Where there is no highway, forge
A byway.

Sin is the skin of God, that is
My cover, my shawl;
May my feet be remote—controlled
By Your wish.

May my sacrifice be made
Unto a lack of fire,
In such a fix I cannot hope
For better; where there is no vocation
What equivocation can there be?

The ego I have stored up within my heart
May it now become a stockpile on flames,
In whose flame and flash
May my shadow be blinded.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

What God, My Soul

What God, my soul, has set you
On the fire of darkness! The sins
Of past births have borne fruit.

The cabbalistic incantation of machines
Gives darkness the power of speech;
The cow mooed at its calf, and is gone.

Tell me, if you have ever found Him,
In a wooden mind,
Or in water, or stone, or space?

Whom can I give a sermon?
The pages are all moth-eaten;
Only last year, new book-worms were
born in the book.

We have thought and thought, and thought;
We have even discussed sacrifice;
Now let's throw all rites in the sacred fire,

Leftovers in the narrow mind
Are the ghost memory of a ceremonial dinner;
Hope tries greedily to reach out for a square meal.

I worshipped You in the dark
Never knowing your splendour;
Now, O Kind One, make way for me.

I shall return to You tomorrow
Let there be rain tomorrow;
We, holy ones, nurse no hate!

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Let the Turmoil Be Alive

Let the turmoil
Be alive; let
My mind's regret
Be constant:

That I may connect
Positive to Negative,
That You may reside
In this electric spark:

No cymbals strike here
No drums beat,
No rosaries are held
Here, crystalline:

There's no meditation,
Devotion, nor prayer;
No human feelings
Are renounced here:

Like a steam-roller
Rolling on the road
Leaving behind
All crushed gravel:

So time rolls here
Crushing millions of moments
Grinding
My forehead:

Here, all action
Is a single corruption,
An empty memory
On wet lips:

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Whose Magnificent Pity Issues

Whose magnificent pity issues
A teardrop out of each millimetre?
Grating days after days
Who sells confections to whom?

The mouth that begs is uncalled for;
This is no free distribution of pity:
We liquidate nothing
That ever belonged to us!

Translated by Dilip Chitre

The Empty Darkness is Ruptured

the empty darkness is ruptured,
the black tear swells up
trickles on the cheek dry up
the dew wells up.

my cheeks sore with the marks
of your bleached hair;
on your breast
my fingers lying limp.

o i cannot, i cannot disrupt
the clutches of past nights;
i am awake still, yet
desires graduate into death.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Stay Where the Lens

Stay where the lens
In our hearts was broken;
And in the prism of our hopes
The crack of time appeared.

Wayward pulses will be slowed,
Effigies of dreams will tire,
Around the coffins in cold minds
Only a question-mark will hang.

At such a moment—thin and singular
A feeble pain will leap up
By itself from the bottom
Seeking the split in the lens.

Oh, you should be only here then.
Where the lens cracked;
And in the prism of our hopes
The crack of time appeared.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

This is the Order

This is the order
Of a dark world:
A wick of soot
In the heart of darkness.

A black 'plane
Zooms into darkness
Through black air.

There are no signals
Not red, nor green;
One cannot get lost
In the invisible.

Wherever I go
I am my own partner:
My eyes have turned
Into such walls.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

I Made My Living

I made my living
And thought of bread;
I am good for nothing
To myself in the end.

Now my eyes scratch
Against the barb of blindness;
All knowledge has become
An inverted fence.

Is this a table? Is this a chair?
Is this a chili that burns my nose?
Why does illusion
Stab me in the back?

I am a high-priest of science
And a saint by disposition
And yet I cannot escape
The regret for life and death.

Today I saw a death
And my soul was confused;
The limit of my knowledge
Is the crematorium.

Raise telescopes toward the sky
Smash atoms by the heap;
Are we hungry? Do we starve?
We do not know.

When the mother died
The old man gave shelter;
Now the wife and the sister
Reassure me.

These too will be gone, o Lord,
Then how would this blind man
Trace their steps!

Translated by Dilip Chitre

The Sky was Adroop

The sky was adroop,
Sun's circle straggled,
Like to the dog of hope who hungered,
In the alley of desire.

A shout came from somewhere
"Woman feed a beggar!"

Sun fled to darkness,
The sky was awake,
For someone at some doorway,
Food leavings were scarce!

Translated by Kumud Mehta

Although the Lights

although the lights
have punctured the night
someone still pumps darkness into it

although the laughter
has turned into a mania
loyally the tears bark still.

the rubber night goes flat;
no tyre to spare
in space;

dogs lick the leather
of the hidebound mind
in layered heaps.

whosoever can
may carry the night across
on his own shoulders;

should cover up his eyes
utterly with leather,
— but with a smile.

on a punctured night
made of rubber
make rubber dogs growl.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Skeletons Laugh

skeletons laugh
Watching
flesh plaster-off;
even if you try
very hard to hide it,
finally the teeth
must show their water

ask them what kick
they get out of fucking;
promptly they'll point
at an empty hole
where a healthy penis
should have been.

ask them to show
the signpost of their intellect
their heads' drums
will unleash
the laughter of dry nerves

after all, how wide,
if you ask them,
their territory would be
you'll notice something:
a pale apology for
a fleshy bum.

O innocent Shiva!
wherever you are,
open all your three eyes
and at least now turn
to ashes these
standing skeletons.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

30th January, 1948

"(I fondly hoped)
The puritan mould
Of the sky would crack;
Or that the body
Of the Earth would be torn
Asunder.

Nothing of the sort
Happened; only
    Innumerable obituaries
Rose in the air;
A two-minute silence
Shivered and lapsed
Among the hypocrites:"
        Said January,
Passing,
        To February;
And the Anno Domini
Continued its forward march.

——So may some more years pass,
May the next **Mahatma** come forth;
So may we take a look at ourselves
Removing the blinkers from our eyes!

Translated by Dilip Chitre

My Kite will always Stray

My kite will always stray! The void is a cage!
Oh, yield more thread, let my paper bird fly!

These familiar clouds have rusted
Tattered so, is the style of these cast veins.
Can the navel's fuse rejoin the branch with the flowers!
The darkest night is laden with stars.

The plough breaks, the field vomits clumps of clay,
And you my father, even you hurt my throat!
Just as the spider nourishes in its belly
A million eggs: so a million flames glow in the void.

This kite shirks and shuns them all.
Release the thread o my father; these guts
Are dried. Dried are these guts and the word
Grown leathery: yield thread, let go! Time hangs this moment.

I know even the cage of void has bars
Surely somewhere. And I too am the son of man.
Only yield some more thread and let my kite fly
Swooping erratically to reach those cage-bars.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Let my Hardness Break

Let my hardness
Break, let the mind's
Acid clear
Out, let my voice
Bear the tunes you
Love.

Let the dirt
In my known intention
Clear; and in my unknown
Pen's inspired point
Plant your seeds.

Grant me freedom
Only in my speech;
Let my letters
Carry the shape
Of your lungs.

Let my tongue's
Avarice burn out; let all hatred freeze;
Give my speech's body
The spirit
Of Draupadi.

Let the meanness
Of my ego vanish,
Let me embrace all;
Grant my feeling the accuracy
Of a precision balance.

Let my ambition
Bear the pillars
Of your penance;
Through it let me
Carry the speech of your heartbeats.

Let me feel
With my hands
Your memory's helm;
Grant me the patience
For a great effort.

I swear by your desire,
I swear by luckless people;
I swear to keep
My eyelids
Open.

Grant me the courage
And give me the humility
To see whatever I must;
Let my intellect bend
Like hot steel;

Let it through senses take
The impacts of the world;
Let it burn inside
Intensely
For that which lies beyond.

God, you are the master of meaning!
I am a mere beggar
Carrying the burden of words;
My want knows no end
And the giver is the Lord!

But whatever should I
Ask for, whatever should You
Give; where you alone are the giver
Of whatever You take
By Yourself!

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Then when the heart

Then when the heart is full to the brim,
When sweat is wrung from every limb,
And on the utterance of words,
Rests your tight grip.

Then, this sinner's palms
Would shed a little white on black,
Then – and only then! As for always,
The same usual black on white.

Translated by Kumud Mehta

Lord, Let this Grill of Grief

Lord, let this grill of grief
Be so constructed,
Let this iron be moulded, with such an iron
Will, to stay hard,
That burnt out, it may blaze again.

Give it what Kunti was given
A precious but gloomy devotion,
Cast such devotion into nails
And hit them hard
Into the gridiron fate of this grill.

Let life be broiled,
Let the fat be fried out,
Let the steam of aliveness evaporate;
Lord, even so,
Let the terrible soot of your name
Gather in the joints of this grill,
May your fumes blacken it
With their intoxication.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Doped with the Opium of Clouds

doped
with the opium
of clouds
these leaves
in a green
hypnosis;
the monsoon's gambit
on a branch in summer.

birds sit with wings closed
not one feather excited
the bell around the neck
of the pregnant cow
speechlessly pines.

this path is
beaten black
kneaded well;

see how the eagle-hawk's
beak is stopped
in the midst
of crumbs.

the brakes
of the train
pull up the wheels,
and the locomotive's breath
is cut short;
a nostalgic sigh
is choked
hot
unheaved
in the earth's lungs.

let the blade of rain cut
into such air
whenever it may;
until then this world
in this long hot summer
is drunk
with a mirage.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

I Came for a Moment's Rest

I came for a moment's rest;
Rested my tired feet;
And you of all, suddenly
Questioned me "who?"
And all the weary
Intentions of my mind
Were turned to shit.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

INDIRA

'Listen to Me'

Darkness besieged the house
Cloudburst swooped on the roofs
Loneliness billowed through every corner
To ambush me . . .
Alone, I lie still with my eyes closed.
Through the darkness . . . tiptoes the door of the house
Stands a little to the side . . .
'Listen to me,
I remember the tapping of those fingers;
And beneath the rouge
Stirs an impression
Of past life, of those raindrops
Spattering from the sky.'

'Listen to me . . . '
With a hand on the arm
The easychair whispers.
'Do you still remember
That twilight hour . . .
You did not know —
He was waiting for you, with eyes closed
An unbearable load had gathered
Black lightning was flaming.
I still feel
The midnight whirlwind
In the thick jungle
Possessing me.'

'Listen to me'
Down the roof
A raindrop trickles on my lip . . .

'Listen to me . . . I remember
In the first hour of that midsummer night
The torrents of rain locked him up
By your side, unexpectedly.
When he got up
To close the open window
The way he said . . .
I heard his words myself
"I fear this thievish lightning
Will rob these eyes of yours." '

– I struggled, got up
And started running
Through those things, through that water . . .
Through every corner
My palms pressing my ears
Keeping away those strange words . . .
'Listen to me'.
'Listen to me'.
'Listen to me'.

Translated by Arun Kolatkar

Wasn't It Just Now . . .

"When did you come?"

"Why now — before you –
After you came."

"After so many years we meet . . ."

"Why years . . . we were there just a while ago —
On that ground there in the yellow-brown grass,
There was a little plant sprouting
In front of us . . .
Bare branches;
A tangle of black wire;
At its end was a grey-black bird;
There was a strange black wind;
Swearing by the hair

Streaming in the wind
You asked . . ."

"Oh yes . . . I remember it vaguely . . . so vaguely . . .
But after that
So many unexpected turns of things;
So many years passed . . . years . . ."

"Silly . . . only now —
I returned through that grass;
See . . . even though you picked them out . . .
These many thistles in my dress . . .
Feel them . . . if that's a lie.'

Oh that's a lie . . .
You are standing here . . . a lie!
Oh, that's only the colour of the drop
That has dripped over this yellow blade of grass . . . .

Translated by Dilip Chitre

The Mirage

I stand at your door.
The door is shut, but my feet *
Are eager to slip out of my shoes;
My finger trembles on the light-switch;
A commotion of red electric birds of sound
Rises like an upsurge in my limbs.
Unable to bear it
I clutch the doorframe
With helpless hands;
My breath listens into the room;
My eyes are fixed on the door,
On the eyes behind the door . . .

* a marvellous pun in the original is lost in translation. 'Chapalanchya bandhatun" may also mean "lightning-trap" besides "out of my shoes".

And the wooden panels of the door
Turn into a peacock crest
— Dancing —
—Flashing —
Dazed, I close my eyes . . .
And here I am,
Through that door, already
In that strange place,
At journey's end,
—In a glass jar filled with sunlight.
Mind turns, turns,
In its agony.
How am I here, how am I here.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

This Prison

Even though the imperceptible
Surrounds me
Every inch a pillar stands,
And words stand ready on my lips
To arrest any feeling.

Constant around the pillars
Your kind and watchful
Eyes circulate.
Wings freeze over the body
The dumb and eager beak
Opens wide.

Without you, this is your cage,
This is your vigil, without you;
Free me from here, once,
Why . . . why . . . for love's sake . . .
. . . This prison . . .

Translated by Dilip Chitre

How Suddenly

how suddenly
the sky
of my mind
is tilted
and the moon, the stars, trickle
and spill out far.

brims in it
the mirage of darkness;
the void depth
drags deeper
the impulse.

midnight held
by a sorcerer's spell, and broken,
leans over the bank of the void,
grief of numberless births
holds to the heart its explosives.

drawn by the water's attraction
it dives straight and deep;
one bottom to reach
and the bottom's fire to catch.

midnight catches fire,
the waters of darkness catch fire;
in the char of the day
stands in pure grace
a Tulsi plant.

Translated by ***Dilip Chitre***

If the Leaves

If the leaves of the pimpal
Pause and listen
In the evening
They will draw in
The bittersweet honey of an answer
With a sharp syringe;

If the black waves
Drink
The anxious disturbance in an answer
Darkness will lean to kiss it
With unceasing lips;

The question stands still in your eyes
Cloud-charged, cloud-dense,
The answer is flashing upon my lips,
But I have no words
To hold it.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

In the Slow, Steady, Water of Darkness

in the slow, steady, water of darkness,
flowing with my feet,
I find the dark sky missing overhead
which can be grasped within a horizon;
there's no dim street under the feet,
which is limited by two points;
there's nothing anywhere around,
that can be named.

there's only one.

nothing pictured in the eyes;
nothing

whispering in the ears;
there's nothing anywhere around
yielding its stimulus to touch

there's only one.

there's only one obstinate knowledge
gripping my arm . . . close to my breast,
mind of my mind's own mind
perceives it:
I am walking with you.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

VINDA KARANDIKAR

Fierce, Like a Maniac Murderer

Fierce, like a maniac murderer
The sun charges on, wide-mouthed;
The lean yellow dog sits on the ground,
Chewing the sand,
Hungry,
And charred by a curse.

With white cloud-spots
The sky is leukodermic;
And below
Seven vultures forming an arrow
Shooting into the South —
Decorative denials
On a sterile canvas!
Time stops dead
Gasping,
And heaving a final sigh;

Far away
A drum beats somewhere
strong, hard, dry;
And parched emptiness
Swallows the world
Through multiple mouths.

Wide-mouthed the sun charges on;
And the blue yawn of the horizon
only fans
The live coals in the eyes.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

You and I Run

You and I run
From tooth to tooth.

My chest was crushed
Under the Pyramid's stone;
The mummy laughed at me
From its pale mask of colour;
You said,
"Will the Pharoah marry
His sister tomorrow?"
I said,
"Will these leftover morsels
Last until day after —?"
He said,
"The stony leg of the Sphinx
Is on our head."

Slaughtered bodies behind me;
Mute corpses behind you;
You and I run
From tooth to tooth.

On the great wall of China
Each mound bears a ghost;
Even the stone is leprous
With unjust suffering;
You said,
"Will the embroidery
On Confucious' gown ever fray?"
I said,
Can even the Buddha cheat
This haunch on my back?"
He said,
"Who is supposed to suck
The cream on civilization's lips?
History repeats itself,
History cracks apart;
You and I run
From tooth to tooth.

In the black waters of Yamuna
Is Kaliya's raised hood;
A Taj is turning
Pale on the bank;
You said,
"A monolithic rose is blooming
Upon this monument of love."
I said,
"The Taj is leaning
Gradually toward the river."
He said,
"The black elephant of darkness
Is rocking in front of the Earth."
What is hidden under your feet?
The cadaver of a sacrificed man;
You and I run
From tooth to tooth

You and I travel
From tooth to tooth.
Black teeth, white teeth,
Rotten teeth, decayed teeth,
Some wise, some stupid,
Some old, some fresh,
Some yellowed,
Some expressive, some speechless
Some containing gold and silver,
You and I leap
From tooth to tooth.
But now who will weep?
I know one truth;
Truth has fled from here
In a Chariot of Gold.
Each one's breast
Bears the mark of a rigid fate.
Dumb slaughtered bodies all over;
History cracks apart;
What's newly revealed in it?
You and I run
From tooth to tooth.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

The Trembling Dawn

The trembling dawn
In biting winter
Gazes
In the silver mirror
Of a still pool;

The lake is asleep
Embracing
Deep peace
Still, absorbed
In a trance of satiation.

Old hills
Wear the woollen
Caps of mist.

The white crowd
Of migratory
Birds from the Himalayas
Circles the lake;
Spreads warmth
On the somnolent water;
The wings of migratory birds
Spread out over the heart of the lake
As if the white
Lotuses in the lake
Of the mind are opening up
And a vast fragrance
Chokes up my soul

Crossing space and time
The soul wanders
In the mystic heart
Of the Himalayas
Over the white wings
Of migratory birds:
Chews the tall
Straws of temperate grass
Slowly;

Rushes headlong
In a herd of rhinos
. . . Passes through a vast
Forest of poplars
Caressing conifers.

Goes on searching
For the four nipples
Of the holy white cow
With innumerable horns:
The sources
Of Ganga, and Yamuna,
Badrinath, Kedarnath!

. . . My soul too
Spreadeagled, circles
The bluish water
Of the lake of the mind,
With the speed of light,
And sees
A unique reflection!
Glittering
Glowing
From the waves of light
In an ocean of ice;
And closes its own
Eyes
Blinded by its own lumen!

There I arrive
At the end
Of pilgrimages;
Which gathers
My soul
In a lotus-petalled hand
And takes three sips
To give
A glow of health
To the cheeks of salvation

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Even the Track of Steel Shakes

even the track of steel shakes
under the weight of the express;
and the express
goes crashing through darkness;
the hungry stare of the sky —
horizon's deadly weapon —
cuts into the pitch of darkness.

the sky has a terrific weight
the soul's neck is tender;
therefore I pardon you
o my soul,
o my terrified, my cowardly soul,
o victim, o victor of death,
o gutless one, o ocean of immortality,
o my terrorized and terrified
trembling soul!
why be ashamed?
If fear is the mother of life;
yet his fleshless wrist
displays its bracelets of fire.
I pardon you o my soul,
Who hath a sinner's conscience.
The peace-soft-emancipation-free wig
Of the hair of God's grace
Does not become you.
Enough, enough this mane
Of savage pain.

Our love shall always continue.
Until the bangles of fire are smashed
This life isn't widowed.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

A Six Beat Rhythm for the Drum

Eyes which drink the body yield to the savage
Colours in winter. The exotic bird on the pomegranate's
Branch — flowers as it flies, like the fan
On a geisha's cheek.

Then my lips dissolve you and drink you
In a six beat rhythm for the drum.

Those lips of mine consist of six beats.

The moment arrives always untimely; passion
Becomes mystified by a scent; your unconscious lower lip
Outgrows my sky's compass; and winter turns
Into a peacock madly dancing under your bloody mouth,
Then eyes turn into frenzied peacock feathers;
Your darkness becomes breast-shaped;
My palms' bowls collect it;

That erotic solo of mine consists of six beats;

Spring like a horned bull sniffs and charges
Into the winter; flowers are charged;
Each petal has an unbearable moment's smell;
When your hips swallowing up the earth
Roll boisterously on the green grass . . .
Your virginal solo needs the spasmodic embrace
Of my six beats.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Triveni

(Triveni = the confluence of the three holy rivers, Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati – the mythical river believed to meet the first two secretly underground.

This translation is from the seventh section of the original poem onwards.)

7

Gathering
Tremendous momentum
In a single moment
Blowing off
In a whirlwind
All prearranged life
one day
You arrived
Taking your own time
Crossed the threshold
And said:
"I have come."
Staring straight into my eyes
Simply: "I have come."
I who had been
Waiting for ages
Was stunned.
I was stunned.
And lowering
My eyes
Nervously I said: "Oh really!"
But I had grasped
The terrifying truth straight away
I shuddered
In the emptiness of my soul.
And you redeemed
In a single moment

All you had lost.
Standing
On the pinnacle
Of your triumph
You felt, you were
Taller than the sky.
In eyes brimming over
You composed
The decomposing
Cadavers of desire
And said:
"I am going."
And before
I could say
Superficially, "Wait!"
You vanished, beyond the sea
Like a sunset
In the expansion
Of waves;
Although even now
In the snoring of nights
I am still haunted
By the words "I have come."
And the blackness of day
Breaks out.

8

In the pale pale twilight
When the ramparts broke
And candles were lit
In the organs
A devastating intensity
Spread out
Through electrified hair,
Moistened.
Leaning against the bed
In the dense
Dumbness of raised breasts
You stormed through my body

In a lightning shaft
Spoke without words,
That which is beyond words,
That which is insolent. Setting fire
Burning.
In a shaft of lightning . . .
Palaces quavered
In a quivering lake;
Matter was fused with moment.
And we slipped
Out of the clasp of quantum
In the wetness
Of the light
Beyond.
Then we resolved ourselves
Into the innermost fragance
And the air grew hard.
Then we knew
The meaningful muteness
Of awakening matter
Mutely we sat
Close to the mute
Solidity of the thing.
And felt
The texture of mahogony
Solid, stern;
The straightness of teak,
Its compliancy.
The bonus of being.
The fullness of unbeing.
In the pale pale twilight
Mutely we mixed
Then you were not you
And I was not me.
But awareness had assumed
The figure of passion.
The sinful husks
Of conditioning fell off
And primordial sanguinity
Emerged.

At such a time
You were not you
Nor was I me.
We were motivated
By the elements
In the pale pale twilight . . .
. . . When we arose
From the darkness
Our bodies extinguished
We felt, we had cooked
In the sanctuaries
Of paleolithic caves
Innocent human flesh.
The sweetmeat offering
Of an amoral kind.

And had lit
A spirit-lamp
On the body's threshold
To worship the infinite.
In the pale twilight
We sieved
Darkness through our pores;
You put a needle
On the disc of each cell
In whose living grooves
The music
Of primordial blood
Was recorded . . .
You tied
Cobras to the waist
Of lightning . . .
And the leaves
Of touch sprouted
Over the blossoms of blood . . .

And the body
Itself convinced us
Of the body's shortages,
When the diving

Bluebird flew
Into the sky's
Infinite blue
In the pale pale twilight.

9

Do you remember
    The vast rolling
    Fluid
    Stretches of sand?
The untimely growth
The stony solemnity
In the eyes. The conflagration
Of rains. The sparks
Of memory, brittle, crushed,
Do you remember?
        The lonely ghost
Walking slowly through
The valley of minds torn apart . . .
The sound of boots . . . lone . . . alone . . .
The mastication
Of blind ambition.
The decapitated
Present running
Without the sighted
Head of the Future . . .
Do you remember?
            The beginning
Of mock fervour.
The food
Licked from the threshold of gold.
Smelt by others
Craved for by us.
Plans
With their flesh waning.
The terrified soul
Escaped from the guillottine.
Thirsting for pleasure,
Cursed by myself,

All these, do you remember?
The soil rubbed
Into the scabrous lesion;
And the *mantras*
Violent, desperate?
O powerful woman!
When you step
On the wedding-platform
With the diadem of these
Memories on your head
May the golden
Flock of your senses
Protect your love!

10

Why
This endless overture
That parches
The throat
Of Ashwaghosha?
Hiccoughs
Are quenched
Where they start.
And the self-satisfying
Masochistic pleasure
That ripens slowly
Remains.
The emotional essence
Of events evaporates
Like camphor
And
A structural graph
In the context of place and time
Remains
After even the undisposed
Masochist pleasure
Is over.
This is
The truth between us

We both know.
Do you remember?
How unexpectedly,
After so many years,
I met you;
On the electric train.
And yet
The old surprise was dead.
Earlier
In such accidental
Meetings you teemed
With terrific voltage.
How we stumbled
Upon memories.
How the air
Throbbed with inner pain.
All this is gone!

Now
Meeting, we do not meet;
Away
We are unaware
Of being away.
Now the colourless
Chain of a mutual
Relation remains
Interlocked in the intellect,
The phantoms of events
In a gestalt of dotted moments,
There's still a kind of
Honest, abstract, abnormal,
Grief within grief
Of the lack of grief.

... You said
(somewhat in fun):
"Why do you blow
The ice-cold fragrance of earth
Through the steel
Pipes of your bones?"

I said,
"To blow you out;" you said,
"Only to make me extinct;
(Someone said; "That's only a game"!)
But now surely
You are shocked to see
The vast kindness of Destiny
Feeding darkness
With a lightning – spoon . . .
. .. At least we should
Have the freedom to have
Our own playhouse
To totter down
Upon our birthday
. . . Why do you try
To scare with a cat's stare
The little mouse
In a cage of ribs.
When your cat-like eyes
Do not even have
Any power left to weep?

Translated by Dilip Chitre

The Knot

Leukemic evening
Vanished
Taking the support of the blustrades
Of the Western horizon
Into the hospital of the West.
The leaves of the coconut-palm
Behind the bench
Trembled at a touch of the wind.
She said,
"Do you remember something?
Eight years ago the leaves
of the same coconut palm
Used to touch our backs!"
He remembered, how

While kissing her passionately, those leaves
Had touched his back, that sudden convulsive fear,
– The abominable snowman wandering on the peaks of
perception–
"Yes I remember"
He said, "...and have you noticed
What oversized coconuts have grown
On this undersized coconut-palm?!"
Unknowingly
His words needled her own sense of lack...
And later she adjusted her saree
Over her flat chest
And clutched her plastic handbag
Holding it close to her breasts.
"May I ask you something"
She asked, "How long are we going
To date like this, to meet like this, how long?"
He moved his index finger
Neurotically between the pages
Of the Sartre play he was reading –"Lucifer and the Lord"–
And muttered, "Who knows?"
Vexed, weary, frustrated.
She was irritated,
"You ought to know, you, you yourself know."
The certainty his knowledge knew
Eight years ago, had dissolved
In the drainage of circumstances.
He remembered
His great forecast of the War, his critique;
His anticipation of the future;
The castles carved on the fog of the future...
...Now all collapsed.
(A procession celebrating the Fourth
Anniversary of Peace was marching
Along the street right across;
Proclaiming in a voice of steel
The reign of Peace)
Abruptly in the meanwhile
He remembered another girl;
Another moment, broken away...

Those days, which danced around the fire, madly,
Those days, untimely and retarded.
The insatiable glory of pain,
Lost forever. "Oh no, no, no.
It was impossible. I had no guts;
But if it were to be . . . if only . . .
If only my chest were broad enough!"
He laughed at his own dead soul.
Murmured to himself, "What has to happen,
Happens." Two furrows on his forehead
Moistened by sweat in the Mid-April heat.
"You yourself know" she said,
"You do, you do!" in a flirtatious tone
(Of course well-rehearsed, while
Eknath Samant used to date her.
. . . . If, 'Nath weren't commissioned
By eternity . . . then perhaps . . . but why . . .
Swine!) "You know," she said, "surely
You do! Don't you remember? You said . . .
Let the War end . . ."
"Yes; what had I said? When I'm settled,
When I feel secure."
Pretending she wasn't really angry,
She twittered something softly,
Playing with a button. She was really
Tired; terribly tired; and therefore
She couldn't afford to remain tired
At least now!
(Demanding two months'
Salary as a bonus
Workers were marching towards a textile mill
Shouting "Long live the Revolution!")
She mewed, "Oh tell me, tell me,
When will your World War end?"
He said, "Who knows, who knows."
"Why don't you ask that madman there?"
She said, with strange irony.
. . . Across the street a madman walked,
Half-nude, with a ragbag on his head,
Looking for more . . .

He felt,
They were both caught up in some gigantic wheel...
And that wheel was rolling
Down the sheer slope of Time
Without will or direction...
In the vast flood of a Destiny
Lacking will or purpose
He recognized the freedom
Of his own desire's whirlpool;
To know, not to live;
To choose, not to create.
In the same inspiration
He pulled out of his plastic purse
The letter that fired him out of his job.
The letter he had just received.
And he laid a paper sob
On her hand playing with his button.
She returned, that day, never to return.
Drawing strength from shattered hopes;
When, seeing the skeleton of the Future,
Her fear of uncertainty melted away.
Today, she found for the first time
Courage in loneliness. Hopeless fearlessness.
And he too found
A little unexpected satisfaction
When she turned her back and he saw
For the first time in eight years
In her braided tresses
The knot of a wig.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Night Drives its Drill

Night drives its drill around the lonely one; and
Future's foetus falls dead under the ceiling's saw.
A trident lingers near the ceiling, makes its mark
On his chest, and leaves. Hands conspire with it.
The freezing wave of cold hits the window panes,
Moves toward the bed. Straining their necks
Walls heave sighs, their eyes shine.

The long tongue of the nameless turns around the
throat and stares up.
When night drives its drill around the lonely one,
darkness is given a form.
When the world drives its drill around the lonely one,
One cannot bear the sound of one's own heartbeats.
The form, which human blood fears from its beginning,
and to escape which
It runs through all the veins; that form
Draws closer; its lips move;
Its hands begin to grope about . . . And somewhere a bell starts
tolling . . .
When the far off threat of the locomotive stampedes
Across the chest of the lonely one

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Thunderbolt-Sukta

A million skeletons marched alone: I looked on
The skeletons had life in them, since they moved
The skeletons had life in them, since they walked
Their left foot was forward, but hadn't touched ground
Their right foot was behind, not lifted up yet.
When the one in front moves on, the one behind is left behind.
Watching a million skeletons march I stood alone.
They stood where they were watching a million thoughts march!
My thoughts walked, my thoughts moved,
I was thinking, since I was calculating.
I was thinking, since I was measuring.
I thought about thinking in terms of thought,
At the turning of thought a herd of skeletons turned.
I walked alone watching a million skeletons march.
These skeletons were to meet those skeletons.
These skeletons were to fight those; hadn't yet started fighting.
Even when thought strikes reality no blood is shed;
Only a frozen flood of terror is released and
freed from the horizon.
If thoughts are vaccinated against thought, even thoughts
become thunderbolts
A million skeletons watch a million skeletons march!

Translated by Dilip Chitre

I Have Seen Something

I have seen something
Was shattered.
And realized: I lack words
To make the vast helplessness in millions of minds
Waiting to explode
Speak.
I lack eyes
To still the mercurial flash of pain
In millions of eyes
I lack arms to embrace
The born refugee, the wretched, the lost,
Orphaned guardian of the world
Who whimpers in a corner.
No cross; no cross for me.
I have seen something
A nightmare in the afternoon
Blind herds in the bazaar,
Tin-roofed hovels, wormy lanes,
Meshes of bones, pits of eyes,
People rotting, unable to die,
People fuming, unable to catch flames,
People grumbling, unable to thunder;
I have seen something
Was shattered;
That blinded me in a flash
And like Oedipus
I was driven on to follow the bastards into wilderness
I felt even in my own mind were
The sprawling branches of the shadow
Of the poisonous tree of ancestry;
The burden of long branches,
Fruits that cannot ripen,
Blossoms burnt out.
And underneath them
A cold tomb.
I have seen something
Was shattered.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

VASANT BAPAT

One Eye

One eye, puritan black, hungry, lean, dry,
Races after the brand-new blue-black Buick;
Over brazen asphalt
Crawling
Over the hill
Rolling, hurtling, speedcrazy eye
Devours the garden
Red and yellow, hardened and tender,
Hovers
Around the pale green bungalow;
Cuts the belly of muslin
Places its foot on velvet
Enters stealthily;
Sleeps, sprawled under the wide-winged palm
In a golden pot of brass;
Gets soaked in the honey
Of the tinkle of glasses
And beautiful limbs flirting;
From under the sofa
On a carpet
Sees
With the pedigreed eyes of a dog
A pleased mouth, a lazy body, a plump thigh;
Flies in circles
In the jewelers' bazaars;
Embarks a 'plane
Wearing dark glasses
One eye.

One eye, plain, guillible, honest, unclothed,
furious,
Brims rapidly

Pours out swiftly;
Its tears shower
Over sweating, drooping, dead flowers;
It is parched, scorched with them;
It enters the wrong places,
It sees unspeakable things;
It penetrates the disturbed tiles
Of some wretched hut;
It sits in a stained spoon
In a jittery pot of brass;
Oblique and curious
It flies off the tangent
Becomes needle and thread to
frayed clothes;
Gets soaked like a tattered
Shoe in the gutter;
Sleeps upon faded flowers;
Simmers in the cooking
In the tramp's pot of clay;
Becomes a loving shawl
To the sapped affection
Hidden behind rags;
Squeezes and drips
Milk into the little mouths
Of lean, thin, pale, rickety children;
Burns . . . Blazes . . . .
Red . . . Brown . . . Soaked full . . .
Naked . . . Naked . . . Maniacal . . .
One greedy eye is blinded by the glitter
One eye drawn back observes

Translated by Dilip Chitre

SADANAND REGE

Song of the Deaf-Mute Boy

The boy sitting there on the bench
Is deaf-mute
Did you know?

He is watching the fabulous rain of light
Falling on the horizon's wing
As he sits behind the window's eyelid
It drives the tonguebound bird
Mad in his dumb mouth
It flutters desperately to catch
The lovely fall of drops
Gathering light
Then suddenly he realizes
That he lacks wings
Is deprived of a skyward flight
The bird sharpens
Its acute beak of pain
Against the dumb bars
Of the cage of muteness

Slowly the window's
Eyelid melts
And is lost in a dark embrace
The snow-drops dim
In the garden of mute eyes
The dumb bird becomes . . .
A floating flower and star . . .

But by now
You have yourself become deaf-mute
Do you know?

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Horses

An alloy of iron and bronze
Brushes a menstruating mane against the Sun . . .

Eagle's wings blaze out in the feet
Controlling a sky that slips out of a bowl of sound . . .

The stag from the moon stands on the cliff of the eyes
Caressing the downy storm in the blood . . .

A prolific neighing cracks the sky open
And a jewel gleams in the raised hood of the fifth note

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Old Leaves from the Chinese Earth

(I bought a Chinese book at a second-hand book shop. I got a Japanese chap to explain it to me. All that I could make out of it is what follows—)

I am Chiang Liang.
Once I was crossing the bridge,
There was an old man sitting there.
As soon as he saw me the old man removed
One of his shoes, and threw it, on purpose
Into the river
And said to me:
My good fellow, my shoe
Is fallen in the river
Please get it back to me.
I was furious. But I curbed my temper
And jumped into the river.
As soon as I came up with the shoe
He threw another into the river.
" Oh, there goes the other one too."
I dived into the river again

And returned with the other shoe
And the first one was thrown back into the river
I was frustrated; then he said:
Meet me here again after thirteen years.

After thirteen years . . .
There was not a soul on the bridge.
There was only the Sun blazing above it
The size of a tiger's jaw.
I waited for him a long time
Then came down and looked into the river
There was my own face behind the Sun
There was nobody on the bridge except the Sun,

But someone spoke out of my bones:
One shoe is life, the other is death. . .
I recognized the voice.

Translated by ***Dilip Chitre***

Lunatic Lyrics — I

"Every civilised human being, whatever his conscious development, is still archaic at the deeper level of his psyche."
—Jung.

She is still unmarried.
Yet already she has a child:
Made of rags.
It is said her husband lives
In the basement of the hospital.
He never leaves the basement.
She too never leaves her ward.
Then how could she conceive the child?
She asks: did Kunti ever have
Karna's father with her?
I am a virgin, like Mary.
I too have a husband like hers.
A child like hers, given by the moon.

She has tied a rope around the baby's neck.
Why a rope? Come on now, you know!
Doesn't it need to be taken out for a walk?
But wouldn't the rope hurt its neck?
Let it hurt, if it hurts. It'll be a
suicide without much
Ado. Taking the baby in her arms
She continuously searches for something.
What are you searching for?
Where has my child lost its halo?

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Girls on the Bridge

(Edward Munch)

Space about to pounce
Has whipped up this vortex.

The surroundings are familiar . . .
I think I've seen even the girls elsewhere.

And now they stand become symbols
Lost, gazing into the whirlpool's darkness.

Meditative forms . . .
The flatulent swirl of the North wind.

Lines on the swing
Gather heaven and hell on the brush . . .

The finely filtered light . . .
Laid cold as a cadaver.

Such loneliness . . .
On this bridge only . . .

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Ninth Poem on Death

My child, I do not myself know who I am
How can I introduce myself?
I who flow softly like the breeze
Sometimes reap a full standing crop
With a whirlwind sickle, how shall I explain?
I see my own image reflected in your eyes
But how can I guarantee that
This image without a face is mine?
I am the fraction of the fraction of an atom
Child, do not smother me in your little fist.
God fathered me . . . You fathered God . . .
God is while you are . . . I am only till you live . . .
There is a great mountain beyond that invisible
shore . . . .
I intend to deliver a sermon there, sometime.
Until then
Being . . . unbeing . . . a single worm
That swallows itself up . . .
Ask me to grant any other wish of yours
Except an aspiration to be immortal;
O Nachiketa!

Translated by Dilip Chitre

The Magic Eye

Pure-Being on one side
Non-Being on the other,
Both crystal-clear.
Who am I? Who am I?
I might be the ominous eyelash
Draped over the Eye
Of the Ten Incarnations.

Thought is all-pervading
All-embracing

But without its intercourse
With the symbol,
How could it get the revelation
Of Non-Being being Being
And Being being Non-Being?

On one side the Being of what is true
On the other
The scarecrow of what is not true,
In the middle but the Magic Eye
Staring into the void.
Who am I? Who am I?
A tear-drop of Destiny
I fumble on that Eye-lash.

Translated by Indrasen M. Jayakar

The Poison Dance

Krishna speaks to Meera....
But her ears are moon-choked
And in the temple of her breasts
Someone is playing on the flute.

Krishna speaks to Radha.....
But she too is not in her senses.
At the altar in the constellation
Of her bosom,
Passion smoulders
In the jingles of the dancing-girl.

Krishna becomes white as a star
And the fair girl black
With his empoisoned blood.

He is in the ecstasy of her impetuous rhythm
And she in the rapture of her own poison-dance.

Translated by Indrasen M. Jayakar

Waiting in a Maternity Ward

A still wind —— a still sunshine,
A clock without a dripping sound
Its dial settled in a timeless void
Still cradles —— still sparrows.
The unheard sound of a fading lullaby.
Only coagulated marble in the atmosphere,
Only doctors —— only nurses —— white as wax.
Will the little feet shuffling into this world
Be as cold and white as death?
Or as footprints of ivory on a marable whiteness?
Or in sending him into this muddled world
Will Destiny have imprinted his feet
With swastika signs in a rich henna red?
How will his eyes be? How his hair?
Will his complexion be fair or dark?
Will he be painted yellow or copper-red?

A still afternoon —— a still evening,
A landscape stilled in a window-frame.
The sleeping past —— the burning present —— the
adorned future.
What will the child carry in his hand?
Raised mounds, a grille, Scorpio or a star?
Or will a mere pencil be sticking out of his fist?

Do I hear the sound of his jingles?
Will I have left my dimple on his cheek?
It is I —— it is I —— as if I am being born again;
Ask the newcomer who he is, and he will say "It is I."
This "I" stands asserting every name.
Now Existence stands frozen in a beautiful moment:
We are all of us being born again
From Adam to the Damned Man.
Wait silently and hold your breath
The newcomer must be received in reverence and silence.
Arrest your movements in figures of wax.
Do not budge an inch. Wait.

Even a smile will blur his photograph.
Ready? . . . . . One . . . . . Two . . . . .
Alas, there has been a mistake somewhere
The star over the cradle has shaken a little.

Translated by Indrasen M. Jayakar

Ship

Here on the seaside sands
For ages have I been sitting
Carving with the drooping feathers of loneliness
The marble birds
Of bronze-brown dreams . . .
And far away
On the radius of the rainbow
I see a lobe of fire
Shaping out of midsummer heat . . .
Its swagger says to me
That insolent ship is yours
That haunted blot of light
On its sail
Says the same thing
The same thing
The chorus of colours
Dancing and singing round the peepul tree
of the West
Says the same thing
The deep, dark sorrow of the sky
Embracing the horizon
Says the same thing
These hills of glass . . .
These caravans of clouds . . .
These arches of rocks
These skeletal palms
I know what they are saying to me
And I also know
That you are a witch

Sailing this ship of quicksilver
. . . In a moment now
When through your painted fingers
Skips a wave of darkness
And on its giant track
Are milled these bronzed, marble birds
Of my dreams
Then
This ship of yours
Will set
In the sun!

Translated by Arun Kolatkar

ARATI PRABHU

One Day's Luck

One day's luck consists of
Waking up without feeling utterly inferior
By the time one carefully preserves
The normalcy of body speech and mind
It is already evening

The far shore is a vision glimmering
Through the vents between rib and rib
One who stumbles fumbles between
Yes and No cannot see with shut eyes

Dripping in through cracks cracks
The clamour of melted glass
Can anyone through it get tuned
To the whispering pictures of memory

Thirst as long as this entire life
Is as small as the minimum mouth
Earth's frontiers lined up to the pyre
The bier too sums up the size of the corpse.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Trousertight Ego

Trousertight ego, as it's torn
Skyrockets the filth

Raise towers; as everything totters
Mudsoaked lie the shores of mind

We might as well fill up our own
Darkness, grinding our breasts

At daybreak, we might as well
Broadcast darkness with closed eyes

Buds and minds, words and smiles
In these only the flying crow may bathe

Only the mother knows the child's father
We should only choke up with: "Our Father Who Art"

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Sight

Today I sit here by
The window filling in both my
Eyes fully the sight hot far the sky
A high-pitched note slowly
The speechless houses listening to

Will see mind pure after the sight
Is cleared like the noon
Door to door spread out roof to roof
Will perhaps see through it the clear floor
Of some mind so clear it can purify water

Cool yellow fruitage-heavy lemon tree
Like the breeze cool and laden
A labourer woman after pounding gravel
Now suckles her baby with a full breast

Today humans are walking real real
As if an innermost smile is becoming speech
Words will follow after bearing the brunt
Of all this as these tones on ripened fruits

The old image trembles for a while
Like a timid squirrel coming back
To some place from some other
White profusion following the red
Borders' rustling convulsion the earth
Becomes thundering red in a rage

Colours rock n'rolling within colours
Become rarer each image closed in
Upon, becomes light farther below
Innermost concave chord is struck
A note about to about to sound

Heart I feel will reverberate
In its innermost space like a pot
Of clay perfectly wrought and baked
Full the Sun-lotus is closing
Up in a humming's low clasp
The moon becomes introverted far

I today am here sitting by
The window both my eyes dense with sight

Translated by ***Dilip Chitre***

These Two Kids

These two are kids of a she-goat
One is simply gray
While the other is neither gray, nor white,
Nor even black.
Together, the two are the colour of being kid.

Up there is the usual window.
No one in it.
No one looking out of it.
Nor is it curtained.
No one looking out of a window
Might be living in the house.
Amusing, this window.

Now we come to this hill.
Who may be on its either side?
What sort of a ——? What sort ——
Not? Someone of grass.
And the wind too is grass. Flowing
Let's go down the hill's slope.
Here, we go

That house with a window
Is left far behind.

There's a road behind;
There's a road also ahead;
There's a road even at the turning
There's even a tree at the turning;
Birds etc. live in it;
Many don't; there are may be only two or four
Some are a little wet, some dry-wet
Some dry-dry, inside:
God knows whose turning the tree imitates!
Wasn't it the one who sketched the hill
Asked the tree to trace its turning!

This one again, an old man,
A bloody old fool indeed.
He hasn't ripened and so on.
Has grown old straight and simply
I asked him, "Where are you going?"
"To hell!" he said. "Well, go then" said I.
But I don't think he'll go to hell
He turned round the corner and vanished.
I don't think one who is going to die turns the corner.

Here comes the city.
This is a very big city.
Lots of pretty women move smoothly here
In our village river
Boats move exactly the same way.
Where many women move is a city
And where boats move is a town or a village.
What if women move here
What if this is a city
We'll see both — the city and the women

Who is this bloke?
What is he staring at in the sky all by himself?
I thought I might join him. Here, we join him!
I stood beside him without his knowledge.

Then one by one lots of others came,
Came and started staring at the sky
Then that first one staring at the sky
Laughed and left
Then all of them left, but didn't laugh.
I stood alone staring at the sky
Being a stupid bastard.

Who are these two?
And why, at such an hour, they've gone under the bridge?
Let's go. Here we go. Now we're four.
Those two, me and the darkness
One of them held out a tin can
The other poured out liquor in it from a bottle
The first one held it out towards me
Then the other drew out a knife
Showed it to me, the second one drank up the liquor
I started running away as fast as I could.
We are all escapists.
Those three: those two and the darkness.

Where to go now?
To the seashore. Here we go! There was a bench there.
On its back was written,
"Shri Phansalkar donated this
In memory of the Late Miss
Indu, 16 – 12 – 59".
I read it. I read it again and again.
Didn't sit on the stone bench.
Went to the seashore and held out
My tattered body to flutter
In the weirdly whistling wind
Then I muttered, "This Indu,
Daughter of some Phansalkar,
Died young; to her memory ——
I deeply bow."
I bowed deeply.
The sea was roaring.
The wind made noise. I stood.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

These Freshcutlike Eyes

These freshcutlike eyes hotcold
This is my glimmering investiture

Around me sheer cliffs crash
Down . . . Hurled somewhere, I
Walk through the sunset below
The cliff, somewhere, somehow

Muteness calling rocks
Tries to contrive the sound
Of springs cracking out of stones
In a forest of falling leaves
The mind stands listening
Like a cluster of green bamboos

The body stands yet it is
Sheer skin, stumbles
With each spasm of thirst,
The village ahead sinks in darkness,
The foot behind drags erratically on

Hotcold trickles down the cheeks
Saline drop gathering again
In the heart, each stumble
Plucks a pearl, breaks up
The broken rosary, I thread again

These freshcutlike hotcold
Eyes only so much and such my ornaments.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

ARUN KOLATKAR

Make Way Poet

make way poet, jaywalking,
for evolution's automobile
or in its homicidal headlights
wither with a smile

hey beggar, proud as a loaf
of bread, you there;
bright stations of star-lice
based in your hair

of dishevelled death, your breath
smelling of words, you'll sprawl
on a timeside pavement
— a dumbstruck hairy stall.

Translated by the poet

On the Fretful Bed

On the fretful bed a couple surprised by sex
Is the one-legged radius of night
They are transfixed by the drums
Beating a picturesque rhythm in the bestial
quarter of the night

In the bestial quarter of the night the male and female
Leopards drink moonlight and lie prostrate
Before the image of their own ignorance
Howl and weep as they distribute the blood
Of the stone as sacramental food

Translated by Dilip Chitre

In a Room Next to Death

In a room next to death
In a hotel in a way out town...
Lizards on the wall
Will cast my horoscope

In the illhumored room in the hotel
In a way out town
Witness to masturbation
Will be spider in sardonic corner

There I am waiting for myself
Tethered to a room
The door will open by itself
At the creak of my shoe

In the lean and hungry room
In a hotel in a way out town
I am going to dynamite
The ape of my own self

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Two Hairy Hearts

Two hairy hearts clean-shaven
By the leopardine music
Of the phallic oat,
Over their whole bodies
The enigma of an ear tattooed
And vermilion scattered upon them,
Their bed began to march all of a sudden
With the legs of a bier
: the two of us were witness
while we withered and scattered away.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Four or Five Tight and Unripe

Four or five tight and unripe fruits of a hundred
candle-power each
In their blazing hot embrace
Whatever is, is:
The beastly wooden table, castrated
: that has no jaw, has a mane :
A couple is wriggling under its summer-house
Chopped out like the tail of a wall-lizard
The circumscised paws of the summer-house laugh
Like a skeleton without lips
Showing stains of watery and faded old blood
Four or five fruits of green and unripe light
Castrated in unison
In the blazing hotness of their embrace
Whatever is, is.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Satisfaction, Like an Orphan

Satisfaction, like an orphan, blooms at a touch
Like a cigarette thrown into water
On the banks of the river of thirst
Brinjals born blind ripen and are sold.
The empty blue mare passes plucking with her teeth
Lotus after lotus that springs from touch
The twittering Venus in the veins turns rotten

The futile tobacco held close by satisfaction
Is brought out in the open. And no wind
Gathers those sterile pollen
Lotuses with a century of petals each
Beseech for an absence of issue, of generation,
On the surface of a deathly water they bloom
Difficult to defeat like the ten-headed Ravana.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

The Emperor Stands

The emperor stands erect as a chimney on victory's
roof-top.
The flags of worn out echoes of stampeding hooves
surround him.
A vast blank receipt burns in the still mind.
From the leaves of damage, over its various slopes
The thick soup of success runs down
And gathers up in the paralysed cups of his dried up
tongues.

And the cup goggles up an eye placed on the table.
Its stare shatters the emperor inside all armour.

The armoured hand is outstretched to honour the soup.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

The Seventeen Lions Congealed

The seventeen lions congealed
In a carpet are delivered
In the void of the woman's body
Hanging by a rope

The goat of glass in the corner
Takes a metaphysical leap
Transcends the barrier
Of the hanged woman's body

The empty vase flashes
Like the flashgun of a camera
And like the heavenly negatives
Of the snap of a suicide

Issues flowers of blinding light
Which burn the spectator's eyes

Translated by Dilip Chitre

At the Swollen and Black

At the swollen and black bottom of helpless
insomniac sleep
Swift and free-flowing fingers whisper at the pores
Bubbles sputter up thump and climb the spiral
staircase of sleep
And spread a murderous oil on the vast and
splashed up terrace
The horizonless eye of sleep is coloured by a
floating doze

Through the narrow window the ocean of sleep
takes a receding leap
Saved by a few fingers. Those fingers writhe
In the angry and oily hallucination of colour
at the bottom.
I become conscious and pick up my scattered pores
And making an incision into my fingers retrieve
a few swallowed up by them.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Horse

absolutely nominal horse.
its source and spread obscure
as cancer. its flesh and blood in mutiny
against the soil.
the curved wildfire of its anarchic ride
is rapid as the rumour of a raid.
its rhyming hooves
ring true
and bold as bread.

but the outworn royalties
of liquidated stone-ages
(have immortality rusting in their sheath)
their mountains are rocked like an economy

by the rampant terrorism of counterfeit coins
they see the telling effect
of the horse's rhyming hooves
and shaken out of their traditional sleep
they abdicate their throne
and flee.

Only the coins scattered by the horse's ride
remain on the highway of history
idle and innocent as explosive cigarettes.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

The Frog-Hour

At the swampy hour the frogs croak in chorus.
Stars hover and hum.
The whirlwind speck of a cricket
Strikes and addles the eye.
The saw of a cricket cuts
The swollen foot of the wooden hour.

At the rusted hour
A frog whets the blade.
A cricket's hysterical star
Twinkles throttling the silence.

The cricket's bicycle gets stuck
In the neck of the fissile hour.
Earth sings in the frog's octave.

The frogs of my missing hands begin to strum
The balloon and amplifier of the demented hour.

The ring in the earthy finger of the collapsed hour
Winks with its topaz eye of the frog
At a shaft of light.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Bedbugs Titillate the Lovers

Bedbugs titillate the lovers. The sultry air
Makes them sullen, and causes a quarrel.
The fumbling hand gropes for the switch of
light
And while the towering black physical hour
of the difficult
Is electrically undressed
Their nude bodies lose all power to answer back

The inappropriately wide question posed by
the light
Keeps a watchman tilted even outside the
window.

Lovers crush the elementary bedbugs
But the eggs laid by light in the seams of
their minds
Issue pertinently sharp and firebrand neo-bugs
Which are hard to switch off
And the sultry air too continues unchecked.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Of the Rock

the uncontrollable horse of the sovereign
mass of the rock neighs
as the rider of nothingness
hits a heel of iron
in its underside,
rides chaotically in all directions
through the veins of the rock, and the rock
is brought under control
after foaming and frothing a lot.

I see the sky in this rock
contracting at a touch
as this chisel issues

its primary fuse of growing emptiness.
I see the darkness of this rock
running away, rubbing its struck chin,
reeling, enraged,
as the chisel's sleeve rolls up a little to reveal
the powerful wrist of the spring of emptiness
and the first monstrous fist-stroke
begins to glow
impeccably.

I hold in my hands
the chisel's burning torch enlivened
by the oils of each stroke
and I see
the real form and totality
of this cave in crisis.
I see this cave in its prime and juvenescence,
as a star spasmodically begins to throb
in the night in the veins
(of the rock).

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Three Cups of Tea

1

i want my pay i said
to the manager
you'll get paid said
the manager
but not before the first
don't you know the rules?
coolly i picked up his
wrist watch
that lay on his table
wanna bring in the cops
i said
'cordin to my rules
listen baby
i get paid when i say so

2

allow me beautiful
i said to my sister in law
to step in my brother's booties
you had it coming said rehman
a gun in his hand
shoot me punk
kill your brother i said
for a bloody cunt

3

i went to burma
i was arrested and sent back
to manipur
no passport
the police commissioner asked
why did you go to burma?
prickface i said
what's there in India?

English version by the poet

The Hag

death pins his abstraction like a rare but ugly
butterfiy on her brain. tells an offcolour
joke. she laughs, of necessity, a little vaguely.

the hag is stone deaf: you wouldn't even guess.
the window has a curtain. it's florid. it's grimy.
entrenched behind it she devours oranges

in self defence. she likes them baggy. she paws.
she claws. an orange isn't peeled. it's torn. each
fruit a vapid debacle. an invalid pose

in tattered filigree. the hag incites her mandibles
to mob and maul a piece. her entire face
converges in a featureless fury rushes to the battle's

toothless centre. eyes. like a dead horse
on a battlefield her eyes deny the avid farce.

English version by the poet

Irani Restaurant Bombay

the cockeyed shah of iran watches the cake
decompose carefully in the cracked showcase;
distracted only by a fly on the make
as it finds in a loafer's wrist an operational base.

dogmatically green and elaborate trees defeat
breeze. the crooked swan begs pardon
if it disturb the pond; the road neat
as a needle points at a lovely cottage with a garden.

the thirsty loafer sees the stylised perfection
of such a landscape in a glass of water wobble
a sticky tea print for his scholarly attention
singles out a verse from the blank testament of the table.

an instant of mirrors turns the tables on space.
while promoting darkness under the chair, the cat
in its two timing sleep dreams evenly and knows
dreaming as an administrative problem. his cigarette

lit, the loafer, affecting the exactitude of a pedagogue
places the match in the tea circle and sees it rise:
as when to identify a corpse one visits a morgue
and politely the corpse rises from a block of ice.

the burnt match with the tea circle makes a rude
compass. the heretic needle jabs a black star.
tables, chairs, mirrors are night that needs to be sewed
and cashier is where at seams it comes apart.

English version by the poet

Woman

a woman may collect cats read thrillers
her insomnia may seep through the great walls of history
a lizard may paralyze her
a sewing machine may bend her
moonlight may intercept the bangle
circling her wrist

a woman may name her cats
the circulating library
may lend her new thrillers

a spiked man may impale her
a woman may add
a new recipe to her scrapbook

judiciously distilling her whimper the city lights
may declare it null and void
in a prodigious weather
above a darkling woman
surgeons may shoot up and explode
in a weather fraught with forceps
a woman may damn
man

a woman may shave her legs regularly
a woman may take up landscape painting
a woman may poison
23 cockroaches

English version by the poet

Teeth

lord i am revealed
how my teeth gleam
my sides ache. my forehead
yawns. i have unlocked
like a monstrous
pomegranate. do not

touch me god do not
come near me, for all
is grist to my grinding.

my loin has bared its teeth.
my thighs open like iron
maidens. guts whip out.
my nose crawls over me
like a prehistoric
lizard come back to life.
my throat nibbles at my
tonsils. and i grin
having chewed off my lips.

English version by the poet

Suicide of Rama

winding verses stir him up
the turreted epic shrugs him off
the river resumes him
from legend's ledge the hero falls

the cresent cuts a rope of fables
we cloud the skeleton with folk-lore
from valmiki's roof top rama jumps
disturbing a tile or two

his flesh of myth soponified
his arse turned up toward the moon
rama drifts like a gourd
far from sap or shore

man leaves his legend standing
one wave bears the other out
the river refers his bones
to the salt judgement of the sea

English version by the poet

Dreaming of Snakes

how i forget but i escaped
that is what matters
it was an iron snake ripping
my long trail to tatters
if we run into each other
i know he will laugh
where were we he will say and
start where we left off
at any hour i will know him
in any city or town
without ever mistaking his
smile for a frown
what is my subconscious up to
and what the devil
does it mean must it always
speak in parables
i dream of pencils that wiggle
out of my fist
not to crawl down the desk but
to climb up my wrist
reptiles all sort of them
self winding cobras
and boa-constrictors disguised
as candelabras
automatic skipping ropes and
somersaulting vipers
rattle snakes on motor cycles
chasing me their piper
they will burst out of the bedroom
the pythons the adders
and in the toilet or in a taxi
there will be no ladders

English version by the poet

DILIP CHITRE

Prayer to Shakti

Overturn the stillness
Of the revolving night
Open the tombs
Of celestial light
O girl of frigid breasts
Who once gave her flesh
O woman who formed a whole
Like mutely pooled water
In the depths:
                Arrive, and pour
This dumbfounded light
In these arms now
Sinking
        like a sunset
Secrete
The last black star
Unclose your womb
And unroll
This live integer of quiet fire
Into yourself
Unlock again
The closed zodiac
From which the planet
Of my being issued

Overturn, overturn
The silent column of your body
On me
Charge on me
O wildfire bend
My body desires

Its own intrinsic
Bodily
Ash
Carry away in your flood
The million tactile question-marks
Raised on my skin
Enter me and make
Your obscure extension
A live fact

Charge
My dark void, my erect spine,
and my inspired phallus
O prodigious one
O spiralling revolution
Overflood my incurving body
O spinning one
Inspired
In the diluvian delight
Opening
In my navel

Arrive,
I hear you arrive
In my stirring body
Angelic
And hair-raising
Shooting upward
From the ground of my flesh
Arrive,
I see you arrive
Widening
Over the waves
Extinguishing
All the oars
Vast and mute
Crowding the ports and visions
of my being
Sailing in on me:

I hear the oceans unlocking
I hear the chains of rhythm
breaking
I hear my own
Power of hearing
Becoming a loud and monstrous paw
Projecting inhuman nails
The iridiscent drum
The anchor of dissolution
The slow beat
I hear

I hear the whirring feet
In my captured forehead
I hear the mute
Distances
The steady flux of water
At the height of thirst
Your single eye
Lit
And the deadly dance
Heaven-blind
In the slow
Beat

Arrive,
I feel you arrive,
From all round me
You surge from within
You siege from without
You drive the ultimate monsoon
In my empty veins
I cannot see
I cannot count
The absolute
Of your foot.

These fables, these fuels
These debts of lives
Suddenly on fire

These retrograde moments
These onward hours
Take off now
Run
Down the deadly slope
Of all desire
Down to the sea-level of your
dancing feet
In the white breaker and fire
of your dance
Converge with the deadly
Slow beat
Of your feet.

Arrive,
You are arriving,
Unbound in your primordial
Unspeakable form
Spread out
Instant popcorn
Bursting out
Under your unbelievable feet.

Arrive, you are arriving,
You are breaking out
Of anguished horizons
Your original twist
Is unravelled in my brain
These veins now
Are smashed embankments
There is a flood
Of entire blood
These landscapes now
Are subordinate sights
Your immortal
Obscene seed
Unrhymes each petal
Of the difficult bud
Undresses the flower
And reveals

Nude
Erect
The dancing trident

I unsheathe
My mortal body
I open
My tomb's theatre
The Roman-figured
Clocks of my eyes
Stare wide
The secret river
Wells up my thighs
My nostrils cut
Across the smell
And there's the whiff —
Your elemental astringence:
Ripples
Rise in my belly
My entire forehead is graphed
In a single rhythm
Ear to ear
The womb of gold
Melts
To a slow beat.

Arrive, you are arriving:
Nerves vibrate like strings
In the murderous air
Every cadence of yours
Demolishes me
The rhythm strikes down
Each delicate centre
The Male in me
Is ginned
Like cotton on a taut string
Plucked

You are the cloudy
Rock of moonlight

Hurtling down on the world
You smash the black
Surrealistic clay-pot
To bits
You dance
With feet turning black
In a slow beat
Your anklets
Tinkle
You seductive bitch
Tolling the end
Of the world.

Who protected my stripped skull
When, in broad daylight,
In the dump of ignorance
Under the noon's thick furniture
We confused our bodies with love?
Who let
My fine eyes evolve
When all the cities
Were overturned?
Who guarded the balance
Of my rolling balls
In those bestial frictions?
Who searched
For a primordial joy
In the belly of starvation?
You are the first
Furrow and scrawl
Of my ploughing pen
And you are the last
You are the grindstone
Of my grit
You are the rise
And the set
Of my central quietness
You are the bottomless
Well of my suicidal
Dives.

Come, I've broken the branches,
I've withdrawn my full-speeded roots, come,
I've become the speechless
Stump of aliveness
Crash in your axe
And water this tree
Kick away the tumbler
On the edge of my aspiration
Smash up the container
Of my will
Trample the tiger-skin
Of my consciousness
Pull out my pains
By their hair
Bury me deep
In your dark and vast
Female - thick
Slow beat.

My body is turned into a tree
A tree, tree of irresistible applause,
The mad wind of the Three Worlds
Rises in me, come,
My memories begin to clap.

Overturn the stillness
Of the revolving night
Open the celestial
tombs of light
o woman who once
became a totality
of a speechless and secret
pool;

listen to the breaking of these branches
the white wounds of my intellect
witness the gigantic hoax of my senses
smell my forehead breaking open
taste my withering life
touch

these scales of experience
pulled out from the skin
cancel out this dumb fish
massacre this body's beast
crush this opened flower
unfasten this bird
in its airborne hypnosis
and let its feathers
scatter down
into your
abyss.

the wildfire spreads out
from the irrepressible nightmare
and the edges of awakening
burn out
finish now
that vast, blind search
throughout the body
for a total possession
finish now this darkness and this light
cut now the terrestrial knots
in every joint
of each of my fingers
rip up the skin of ignorance
my body wears
smash the anthill of anger
that has grown inside my guts
over all these years
now renovate my conscience
burn me in the whim of your fire
knead me
under your projected feet
wash me away in your cosmic friction
tattoo on my body
the immortal constellation
beyond all endurance
with the white hot needle
of your miracle
unlock with your dance

my five souls
in the irresistible recurrence
of your slow
beat

slight were the visions in the past:
the only man
always starving
in a suddenly
opened street:
the sharp perfume
of the unwashed eyes
of a single woman:
my own shoes creaking
under the hospital-dome
at midnight
in mercury light:
the burning liquor I vomited:
the white flowers of parijata
the bloomed like shadows
underwater
and pleasure swarming like a
million bees
in my swayed body:
I saw your fabulous toe
burning on the turning
Thresholds
and then lifted up
like sheer light
swallowing
everything

I was terrified
at that ultimate switch
and sign of your rhythm:
and in the meantime
your light foot turned
into the whiteness
of vanishing
and laughter . . .

come now
direct
now we meet
full-face
each to each
now our eyes
stare deep
into each
other
now our faces
become swinging trapezes
now the original
ground of our being
will be revealed
under your thumb
which has no beginning —

overturn the stillness
of the revolving night
open the tombs
of celestial light
come, o woman
from heaven, sink
into the sunset
of my arms:

Translated by the poet

A Personal Death, a Private Hell, 1962

"Tous ces services sont la partout, et moi, impotent, malheureux, je ne peux rien trouver, le premier chien dans la rue dira cela."
[*Rimbaud's last letter*]

Then I rip the brocade curtain of my nerves.

In a smoky rain; in the cold, in the gloomy
Glow of death. The road littered
With rusty sheets and nails. Feet swollen.
Wounds all infected. Eyes grilled in darkness.
Tongue convulsed, contracted.

Light crumbles in heaps in my empty head.
I see the sad, begging, rabied eyes of the dog.

There's a rusty old key in my pocket.
The street is empty.
There's a flight buried alive in the sky.

A man I happen to know greets me,
"—And how are you today?"
"Thank you. Quite well." Has my watch stopped?

The baby's toys have all become old,
I have to buy him something new.
And a toothbrush. And D.D.T.
Too many fleas. Ah, see the lights in the piazza!

How many letters extinguished under my feet.
Yesterday the sky was full of unnecessary stars.
This moonlight is bad for the health.
This allergic dermatitis of the eyelid.

What a crowd of crossroads at the next junction.
Didn't start with a map to help.
How come there's Christ on this poster?
Ah, that's why all shops are closed.
I must go to Pandharpur to see if I feel better.
They say God's the best therapy.

Translated by the poet

Private Poem in a Public Garden

1.

Listening to the explosions
Of roses in the garden
One entire season spent
While the children chirped
At the ball whirling in the air.
Heard the noise of growing
Grass, in the still air.
A solitary cloud may pass
Over the sky, filling the mind
Ears turned into bowls
Gathering the rustle

Of ambiguous trees, like
The colour of leaves
Scribbled on the surface of a pool.
The public seasons of a public garden
And each flower enduring
Its own private winter and spring.

2.

Thin yellow ephemeral
Flames of candles
Tremble and break out
In a darkness like water:
Such are the flowers.
Such burning eyelids of flames
Drape the oblong bluish eye
That the wax issues forth
Waxen tears melt and fall
At the eyes' feet,
Sleep, and become amorphous.
Flowers, like eyes
About to die.
God's instruments scrape the subsoil
And implant the design
Of another season
In autumn, while the leaves are falling.

3.

Again the dry
Leaves circle back
To the ground.
Plants do not shed
Any other tears
Like animal tears
That are shed beyond seasons;
They have no eyes
To weep out of.
This is the only
Distinction a man in the garden
Can make between a rose and a dog.
He sits spreading newspapers below the sky
And observes the blue green world
Beyond the glasses he wears

With the suave sophistication
Of a pigeon in the garden.

4.

He thinks of more and more
Skilled gardeners, excluding God.
The pliers and scissors
Of gardeners with imagination
Cut gazelles out of henna.
And he uses the skin
Of a gazelle to squat,
Meditating, upon.
A superior gardener uses
The season itself to cut
And carve out his intended garden.
He never touches trees in reality.
Sitting upon newspapers spread out.
Beneath his bottom mutely in bold type
Atomic Bombs explode.
While he listens to the roses'
Monologues

5.

A public garden is variously useful
As in the good old days public forests were
Meditate in the garden, dance,
Eat food in the garden, love,
The garden is a convenient
Background to several such
Exclusive transactions.
Read Kalidasa in the garden, or
Study aerodynamics,
In any season.
The flowers raise
No objection to that.
But it's difficult to think
Of the garden purely as garden
Even in a song of love:
Absurd emotions flower
Upon most irrelevant trees.
The garden is a public poem

6.

Written by a vast, invisible
Private instrument
Earth that's dug open
Bears the exact mark
Of that instrument.
Roots know that instrument
Unmistakably.
The place that was prior to the garden
Remains perpetually underground
Below the apparent garden
Even after the roots
Are expressed by their seeds,
Like an exact chemical.

7.

Dry, perfected newspapers circle
Back to the ground, fall.
Awareness flowers in bold type
In a human and paper season.
Eyeglasses protect the eyes
From the cosmos – from even the garden.
Tears behind the eyeglasses
Are hot as the wax.
Day by day man's feet become
Grossly misshapen
As eyes burn down like a wick
Right to the vision's base,
Darkening the darkness further.
The garden, mutely burning
In various colours, passes
A flame to the eye ––
Souls are lighted
On the rose's matchstick.
When in the gradual
And burning night
The trees stand like innocent clowns.
The newspapermen arrive on the lawn
And, slapped hard,
Roses in a poem are shocked into awareness.

Translated by the poet

My Ears Ashore

My ears ashore listen intently
To the silent abstraction of oceans
Under pale light winds
The leafless abstractions of music . . .
My lips touch the colourlessness
Of a collapsible sun
Sanguine and salty
When threads of gold
Weave through the liner surface of the sea
A lasting texture.

I have been taught to see all
With a dry eye
Created in cosmic moisture,
I have been taught
To skin the immaterial
When I choose to become poor
Giving up the name
Of He Who Created the Word in the beginning
My ears ashore listen intently
To the silent absence of oceans
My consciousness gathers
The density of oceanic abstractions.

Translated by the poet

Longing

I see your changing cheek
Through intertwining winds
The sun's braided tresses:
Sometimes your warm fingers
Pass indistinctly through my palms:
Sometimes I see only the mirror
Containing your imaged absence,
Which offers a luminous passage
For the sunlight flowing out of my eyes.

My transparent hand is perched like a bush on my eyes
Its rustling leaves are transformed into a feathered
Bird-form fluttering: an ashen pigeon
With eyes gleaming like blood-drops
Out of the faint and petalled pile of my hand . . .
. . . Do you know this speech sounding in my longing,
Do you hear this too? For I still feel your breath
Warmly spreading over my cheek like a blush.

English version by the poet

The Light of Birds Breaks the Lunatic's Sleep

The light of birds breaks the lunatic's sleep
He wakes up moving out of a million dreams
His burning electric wires begin to glow
The lunatic's fingers extend like wires

Stretched out in the silence:
The lunatic's veins widen: he feels
Darkness roaring in place of blood:
That darkness is half a sleep: a wide

Awareness of a kind: even total sleep
Is a blaze in his brain: a flaming awareness
The lunatic watches a sound in the Sun:
And his eyes paraphrase the Sun:

Numberless sleeps and lightnings awaken
A vast lullaby in his flesh and blood
The lunatic sees a bird . . . flying . . . as his
eyelids flutter
And his eyes, drowning, begin to chirp.

Translated by the poet

The Eyes of Bandu Waze

(*Bandu Waze: a painter*)

Turned cinder in the burning spectrum
Intolerable, even more than a sun-stroke,
Mad, drunk, unkempt,
Dressed impeccably in his dirty rags,
When Bandu Waze lifts up his invisible eyes
And SEES
—— The Sun's circle freezes,
The Moon becomes a dribbling eye,
Black, grey, dense trickles go rolling over
The space erected by him.

The Earth becomes a gigantic tear
Burning in the sultry zero
Of Bandu Waze's heart.

His eyes like lost paradisos
Explode into sobs
After gulping down those lines going crazy
Then Bandu Waze crosses
The darkness of flesh and blood
Counting their constellations
He goes deeper and deeper
He wants only to snatch back
In a single brushstroke
The seven colours on the other side of death
Then I see his shoulders
Sailing across the waves of the river of death
Vanishing like a sunset
Beyond the waves of human illusion
Disappearing shoulder-blades
Through the red void darkness of blood
Bandu Waze's eyes
Dissolve into themselves
Go to sleep, hypnotized,
A shapeless foetus they grow

In their sleeping retinae
And deliver the truth
Through the hot ashes
While they burn themselves out
On the pyre of the blazing spectrum

Becoming a white shaft of sunlight
Mad, drunk, unkempt, dressed in rags....
....Not frightened by the collapsing sky
On the road mortals walk....
Bandu Waze....
....The eyeball Earth grew to become vast,
Vast in her grief....

The eyeball, O Waze — you —
Are smashed.

Translated by the poet

In Ethiopia

"I have completed my journey, now I must return the Fleece."

I

The self's legend has archaic curves, a mistrust
Of immediate words, and urgent symbols: the mind
In a flash of knives, skins figures in memory alive:
The maniacal blades probe a past episode.

I reject the brilliant abstractions, turn
Toward the solider object of surviving
Feeling: the image that holds the formal outburst
Together: the double-crossing metaphor,
That bends a dagger into the heart of the mode.

The suspended gestalt slowly unfolds
A wordbound cosmology, a nervous release
From the innermost arrest. Man cannot escape
Without making meaning or unmaking
Himself in the superior presence of solider things.

Beyond the photographic world, without its cognitive
Chemicals, outside the secret realm
Of the mental darkroom, lies a wide
Impersonal imprint, stepping down the footboard
Of imagined light, one suddenly realizes
There are scenes one cannot develop in a lifetime.

The moonrise over frescoed mountains, the church
Clotting gradually in the phosphorescent fog,
A barbaric but silent night holding in its fist
The heavenward stillness of eucalyptus trees;
And finally the mules grazing silently
In the dim cobalt of the moonlight.

I turn the hurricane of my years into a dumb vase
Work the raw experience in a classical clay
Remould the legend of my self with more human hands
And sustain a willed disaster, as I overcome
The irresistible substance of selfhood in the palms
Of that super-ego playing its elemental hand.

It's the death of all earlier motives, a transformation
Of all apparent purpose into the terrifying
Ambiguity of the word: I become my own symbol,
My own other and author: a durable doorframe
In nothingness: an entrance and an exit
For less permanent meanings, a formal metaphor.

II

I came with a disordered mind
To the disused village on the barbaric slope
Listened to the hidden sound
Of the wind among eucalyptus trees.

We made love in the cold season
While the hyenas laughed in the moonlight,
Took no knowledge into bed with ourselves
Kept it strictly white.

Our blood turned the corner of love
Mutely, our minds were deflorated

By the primordial silence of the landscape
That entered and changed us.

The mythos of Africa rolled out within us
Its subliminal drum-beats and silences.

III

It was a sidereal world:
The church, the brothel, the school,
And the hospital — four
Human institutions functioning
In the vastness and purity
Of the primitive landscape.

The afternoon was a puffed sail of light
Crossing the oceanic waves of loneliness
A tall yacht of sight
Cutting across obscure waters.

Was it me that I went through, was it I,
The incessant glare, the earth gone dry?
Was it you I spread through, was it you,
The unrolled parchment of a sanguine sky?

IV

The black priests with impermeable faces
Looked like faded ancestors from a past life
The beggar came much more alive
Leaning against the thatched church-wall.

The giggling whores made no difference
To the essential innocence of the picture
In which the landlord walked under a parasol
And the serfs followed him in brilliant sun.

For months I lay like a groundnut underground
Moonlight decayed in my stopped ears
Trees decomposed in me, bodies broke up,
Rocks crumbled down, light disintegrated.

It worked like a slow infection in a resistant system
Radiating from a hidden focus, a sub-clinical disease
Inexpressive of differential symptoms for years.
Then the symptoms broke out like a sudden fit
Of maniacal laughter, my language suffered
From a nervous disorder beyond repair.

With anguished accuracy I try
To articulate a simulation of deadly impacts
The bloody mythology reeks in my brain
While words run to seed, meanings break down
And mouldering symbols ravage my world.

V

A Christian suffers from guilt, a Hindu from the Ego
A poet suffers from a lack of explanation
In a circumscribed world he looks out for a gap
That may help his articulate escape from emotions.

I recall the Maskal day, when the Ethiopians
Celebrate the finding of the True Cross;
Children carrying prayer-sticks, and daisies,
Encircle the priests in their Dionysiac dance:
"Yesus Kristos!" and the chant in Geez,
A dead and sacred language, evoking terror and joy.

In the evening they light a pile of wood
To declare in smoke the finding of the Cross,
The strange enigma and the ecstasy in their dance
Is something I saw twice, in two years,
At Stefanos, Mariam, Selassie, Petros, and Paolos,
At Giorgis, and Tekle Haimanot, in the deep twilight
The inscrutable dancers around a growing fire
In a fountain of joy, in a cloud of dust.

I also remember how, strangely moved
I was almost drawn into the magic circle of the dance,
And later, humbled by the primitive Christian ritual
Among ignorant mountains, I accepted the bread and the wine.

VI

In the hospital in Addis Ababa she lay
Like a dying animal that has learnt at last to live
In an impersonal knowledge of pain,
And no more a wife but a mother moaning
At the spasm of life forging its own form
In her womb, clenching her teeth on a new and silent
Knowledge: while her kidneys began to fail, her heart to falter.

I lived in the same room, slept in the armchair,
Watched the dripping catheter with swollen eyes;
Ate bland porridge for breakfast, sipped black coffee
And smelt the gradual aroma of slow mortality.
Staring at the orange and green curtains, trapped
Between aseptic walls, sought an escape
From the smothering feelings, once had
An incongruous vision of Christ walking on water
As Doctor Hamlin walked in on the cold floor.

The nurses brought flowers for the vase;
Reading the pulse, Sister Clement used to quote
Some saccharinous lines from Tennyson;
Knowing I was a poet, she always raved
About the local landscape, by way of communication.

Out, from the terrace, I could always see
The ashen airport buildings, the flashing
Aluminium wings, the orderly trees and roads
On the background of mountains, savage,
But always on the point of fading.

The next room was Captain Hailu's, who was shot during the coup.
Had six bullet wounds, but did not quite die,
Was eleven times operated on, an old favourite of the surgeons.
Was also a victim of trauma, his entire family killed
Before his eyes, except his youngest daughter,
Who toddled among the corpses, excited by machine-guns.

The days pressed on: The nurses became friendly,
Brought me free meals from their mess, roast lamb

Or baked fish, pudding or pears in syrup, I learnt
To admire their vital statistics without apparent desire,
And to think with clinical coldness
Of deaths in neighbouring rooms.

Then the night of crisis, of the critical moment
Of caeserian birth: the doctor, with well-weighed gravity,
Prepared me for two deaths: assured would do his best
To save at least the mother: then the theatre
Closed its stainless lid, and I, forewarned, forsaken,
Paced on the polished floor.
In the deodorized passage fear liberated me
From the careful premonitions of a change in destiny.

Vera Clement, a motherly beam on her face, and blood on her apron,
Shouted 'CONGRATULATIONS' to break the spell of knowledge, and said
It was a son, a lovely baby
I reeled under the mercury lights.
Then the anaesthetist, a kind old man,
Made me drink whisky in his quarters to relieve the tension,
Tried to make me talk, reminisced on similar situations.
I drank like a fish, but made no answer.

5 a.m.: I walked back to the town
In biting cold, drank cognac, and looked
At the neon signs winking out of the fog
An insomniac symbol in a sleeping eternity.

VII

Longing is the cardinal symptom of the sickness
The lost suffer from; O how I have longed
Throughout the night! Once we moved from bar to bar,
One brothel to another, the girls danced breathlessly
And turned their bodies from the red light to the green,
Their hips wriggled, their lips pouted, they shivered
Like drumskin in the gold flow of trumpets.

A flashing syphilitic smile
In the otherwise virginal land.

The tourist performed his biologicals
Excited by the exotic, the local intellectual, frustrated, sought
Solace in the somnolent service of the genital.

Back into the cold streets, at three in the morning,
We were blinded by the headlights that flashed and turned
Into our hangover. We woke up with aching bladders, our heads
Reeled, and refused to recollect anything.

Suddenly, I stared up into the sky
Saw Andromeda, and began to laugh like a maniac
In the face of a cosmic fact
And a private recognition.

VIII

One night before the ship arrived
In Bombay, he stood alone on the deck
Staring into the foaming furrows of water
In a brown-green expanse, immense and indifferent,
Through which he pitched homeward, and suddenly realized
A legend of land revealed among the tide-rips:
A knowledge of how the breathtaking flux
Is frozen into enigmatic images, how
The devastating picture explodes into a voyage.

He leaned on the rails, and was terrified.

English version by the poet

Change

I:

They have removed
All traces of trees
From the avenue
The road goes
Terribly straight.

Not a single green
Outbreak is visible
In the blank stretch of the earth.

This is a barren
Metaphysical avenue;
The venue of death
And a beginning.

Even this beginning
Is bleak and workmanlike.
I try too to see
The pure layout
Without details
And turning feelings
Into pure distance.

I wear no hat this time.
The jacket is gone.
I work in shirtsleeves
In an abandoned place.

2:

I love.
Both of us love.
The bed has now
Become strictly white.
We love
In a sort of void.
A hushed
Silence in our bones.
The blood flows
Freer this way
And we don't
Measure its temperature.

The body is born austere,
And its only excess
Is the soul.

You love.
I love.
Both of us love.
In a light
That is neither kind
Nor austere.
We love
Just barely moving
In a difficult bare awareness.

3:

Let the light
Have the blandness
Of a teenage mother's milk.
Let the room
Be lean
As the touch of a lover
Grown old.

The air
May be thin and bright
As two loners
Embraced
In the loneliest conjugation.

Let the senses face
The deadpan objectivity
And remoteness
Of external things
Before we lapse
Into our long drawn out
Copulation as we are
Precariously perched
On each other's being.

4:

Not touching the other
We keep
Each to ourselves.

What do I know
What you feel
Walking barefoot
On the cold floor
Out of my arms.

But surely, there are
Stars in the sky?

I don't know
Moreover, I don't care now
It doesn't matter
What all this really amounts to.
In fact, it never did.

Out of fear we built
A ceiling of gestures and symbols
Which I now
Remove.

Translated by the poet

P. B. WADER

Rhinoceros

The horrid rhino
In the Victoria Gardens
Filthy
Slovenly
Fresh from a mudbath
And attacked
By swarms
Of flies . . .
His creased skin
Stirs simultaneously
In seven different places.

A pool of water
On one side of him
And a crowd of spectators
On the other
The rhino charges
Into the rusty
Iron gate
Their eyes become briefly blacker
With fear
As he charges toward them
Abruptly
And headlong
The crowd withdraws
A little
Shadows totter and fly far away
And the closed gate
Breaks down
Instantly the rhino
Returns to his shed
And vigourously chews
The sugar cane

I wonder if the rhino
Has any regret whatever
But has the show
No end?
And remember, he
Hasn't grown any horn yet
There's only that black spot
On his huge flat nose
The hint of a horn
Itching like death
Intolerably persistent
In awareness.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

BANDU WAZE

Within the Ring of Rings

I eavesdropped:
Within the ring of rings, within
The lemon's innermost lemon
In a surrounding of bayonets.

Aware of me
The walls turned turtle
Chairs started
Remembering
Something, they
In a furious outrage
Turned
Upside down
Crazy
Somersaulting
Then their inclined movement was
Suspended
The walls, the chairs
Became a moving unity
And my arrested pace
Swung
Gathering momentum
I woke up
Confused
Startled
I started running like mad.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

A Recent Poem

The bird that sat on the earlier branch
Leaves the first and settles on the second
The abandoned branch was of loneliness
And loneliness is laughing on the birds' wings.

Loneliness is over laughing is over: wings
Are off along the sight of the flight
Of birds, the sight is on the 10th branch now
The wings are outspread over the length
And the breadth of the branch
In between, the flippant branches fidget.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

SUDHIR KOLATKAR

The News is Nude

the news is nude
if all the tongues are cut and connected
the earth's circumference
shall be covered
one extra tongue however
shall remain
the tongue
of the nude newsman

Translated by Dilip Chitre

As I was

as i was
moving about in the cave
the cave itself
disappeared
i was obliged to hold fast
to the horn of the rhinoceros
of all rhionoceroses;
i could never really find out
whether my own branch was broken
or whether the star
had dropped down

Translated by Dilip Chitre

In the Desert's Summer Irritation

In the desert's summer irritation
Shadow slips, mere moss its support
The ecstatic tower of swaying sand
Does not slip over the moss
Is not caught up in the cactus
Shadow slips, mere moss its support
In the desert's summer irritation.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

A Poem

Never in summer or winter
Did I ferment
Blood must have clotted
Often
But
I don't remember
Ever
A fermentation occured
When I went to see
What hurt my eye
I couldn't even find
A mirror.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

BHALCHANDRA NEMADE

A Hair-Do

In the light of an oil-lamp, how,
You sat braiding your hair,
Ten reddish feet of fingers . . . bare
And avenues of hair unbound . . .
O girl in anguish! How long
Will you run?
The feet of your fingers slip
Over the hair.

Tired by toeing the slippery striations
Fingers turn weary: how you weave
Oh these dangerous roads
Telescoped into the sky!
Set all your hair loose, darling.
Turn every strand of hair
Into a galaxy
Poised
Like a shooting missile
Measuring and intuiting
The burning rhythm
Revolving
From heaven to the underworld.
Let the arteries in the primordial
Cosmic heart, throb open
On each loose hair . . .
—— And your finger's feet
. . . Those vibrant sandalwood toes
Let them stir this smooth, this deep
Ocean of hair
Sprinkling on themselves
Black ripples like pillars of water
Rising
Humming
In the orchestral voice of rainbows
Spinning out of the oil-lamp.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Leave My Eyes

I lost sight of the reminiscent tree
Stared at branches, thumbed
Through the leaves in all the wood.
Nowhere was the honeycomb to be found.
Only footprints in dust; only the dance of shadows
To be seen.

The tree was lost and
The elephant swayed in front of you
Swarming bees stung the deck
A murmuring music followed the elephant
The elephant turned
And again turned
Round and round
The corner . . .
The elephant lost its way . . .
Each step in time with the clarinet's notes
All over the wood tunes lost their way
The ceremonially decked
Elephant disappeared beyond the wood . . .
The elephant vanished behind a leaf . . .
The elephant became invisible
Behind my eyes . . . behind my clouds of tears
My fingers mistook you, oh please,
Now, leave my eyes.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

MANOHAR OAK

Sections from a Sequence of Poems

I.

Me! A crime
Impeccable orchard of sins
Crown-jewel on the temple-top of virtue
I shall tell you a lie head-to-foot
Top-to-root
horse-races, gambling, joints
Gin, sex, cards, pubs, lanes, slums,
Presented as a handsome
Stranger in every face
Is my own
Self.

II.

Every crime has the context of its moral
I was never schooled in your institutions
I am in my mobile laboratory moving
Surveyor, digger, nigger of discovered mines
Surely no salesman, canvasser, or the like.

III.

I stole things in me unnoticed
Robbed banks without guilt, genuinely,
Broke into houses
Pulled down the pillars of what sheltered me
Hidden vaults, castles, basements,
Bottoms of wells, pools, lakes, trees
Habits in the belly of the sea
Locks and bolts in cliffs and crags
Open treasures all fire-sacrificed
And I achieved a loot, a booty, robbed rhythms
I picked up the pickpockets, ran off with robbers.

Lifted the shoplifters
Discriminating visions against visions
Cultivated deception
Went to join fishermen and wove
nets in the lack of water

Translated by Dilip Chitre

We Go into All Directions

We go into all directions
in this city of nothing
streets stop us,
buildings bind us,
oceans halt us,
horizons obstruct us,
our unmutilated expansion
is stifled,
the ropes of all the five
senses cut-off
we make
the sixth appeal
the judge
is absconding
we in a third person attitude
offer and accept
our own sacrifice
our other
stands on a threshold
stepping wherever one may imagine
seizing a chance
streets and buildings ambush us
suddenly we strike roots
guarding their real estate
support is
supportlessly established
buried deep, we
are sure and secure.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Glance Meets Glance

Glance meets glance
A nail stares fixedly
Into the cosmological eye
Your eyes, grief-aimed,
Uncover my eyes from
Disappearing husks
Shove aside the dead leaves
And the mere hint of the wind
Starts a murmuring music
In the dry leaves
Carries me to the
Vast, empty, unthinkable shores
Of an oceanic notation
Unnamable winds
Swerve
Sweep up
Turn
Swoop
Dive down with a bounty
Of mystic notes
Flying out of themselves
Swift and fugitive
Turning a searchlight
Upon the body
Body-dazzling winds
A shaft
Of unpredictable light.
Fists loosen their grip
On the ropes
Of fluid
Motives:

I:

Inhabitant
Of the
Flight.
Consciousness

Suddenly spasmodically pulls
And the voyage
Flares.
Again the nothing-oriented
Illusionistic openings and closures,
The laughing gas
Of counter-illusions:
My consciousness unfastens
A vast uproar:
Moves cognizant fingers
Through the profuse
Hair of sound:
The foaming ocean leaps all over me
I, on a ground growing infinitely scarce
Shoot the crying cannonball:
And my cry
Is shredded to peels
In the peals of the dense
Thundering
Form
Whose hairlocks of mica touch
The infinite shore
Of the unknown:
The flute of your voice
Spreads out the flowers
Of Prajakta over me:
Even if I blossom all over
Again, I cannot return
Because you then turn
Into the sand where
All waves collapse
And lapse.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

SHARADKUMAR MANTRI

To Marilyn Monroe

When you cut the air with the short-winged
swan of your silver hair
Heaven was within reach;
When you scattered the white doves of your laughter
All over, froth fell out of cataracts of white
wine streaming down;
You walked away swinging the water-pots of your hips
And the pretty road lazed under your honeyed feet
And all points and directions yawned to relax;
That day you bruised this flippant Earth
With a burning kiss of your vampire lips
When all your desires were already turned into
nauseated saliva
Which you swallowed;
You gave the heat of your forthright, erect limbs
To the million eyes that craved
When your pure feelings were already turned into tombs
Of marble
And perched on it an owl sang a nameless raga
In the pitch-black bass of the night;
You spread out the silver screen of your soft skin
Over this material world
When the flaming noonday of your heart
Wished to rest
In the ocean's depths: deep as reason may sink
You smeared the ash of your undesire
On the bodies of arrogant personages.
You were nude all your life
And you left a nude.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

NARAYAN SURVE

This is the Story of The Day Nehru Died

Houses warming up their backs suddenly cackled
How the city grew crude!
Then the darkness swallowed a ruby.

Factories in their gowns of stone
Sank deep in thought, lighting their cigars
Then
They all returned with their sodden shirts
Flung across their shoulders,
To their hovels.

"What happened, Sundari?" asks a harlot
"Don't burn the incense today, Nehru's gone!"
Answers the other.
"Really? O.K. then we'll take a night off!!!"

The world that bears a burden
Relaxes in bed.

Sorry, sad, I walk.
Roads awful, silent.

Man pushing a handcart with a paper lantern
I stop him and ask,
"Why carry the light now, mate?"
"Why mister!
It's pitch dark ahead" he said.

This is the story of the day Nehru died
This is the story of the day Nehru died.

Translated by Dilip Chitre

DAMODAR PRABHU

A Poem

who and why laid these
bricks between us?
oh, how many memories
are masons to this wall!

and yet this brick between bricks
tell me, for whom is it laid?

and your downright defiant tenacity!
although it never showed up in-between
you proved it in the end!
then why, remember, remember
you delivered a child

Translated by Dilip Chitre

In the Storehouse

the sun rises behind the sacks in a storehouse
and its rays fall in the generous garbage
sunset occurs between the knees-behind
two sacks: but the full moon today
will happily shine in the garbage!

high-tide and low-tide evenly timed
behind the barrels
the cockroach today will happily roll
in annonymous dissociation until
the ceremonial full-moon sheds its light
in every nook and corner

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Parrots

parrots
are always somewhere nearby
they bring
intimations of green grass
into the heart of the afternoon sun
and guavas come tumbling down
from the green mountain into the sun

parrots need
red-chili plants somewhere nearby
pomegranates float in their cries
and rainbows
spring in the sun

my dear fellows, why does this hurt you?
colours blend in the sun
and unresolved eyes
are somewhere nearby

(and yet, oh! only limited colours show in the sun!)

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Christ

I am bound to this
Effusive foregiveness
Covering myself with a fig-leaf
And threading my contentment through it.

Then off to sleep:
A deep lapse
some vague figures
I saw, while I lay crucified,
And I tried to console those figures.
Now what remains is my conversations

And a very natural
moaning, moaning, moaning.

What race of man may I perpetuate
In this sleep without eyes?
What seed may I grow?
Oh beast, two-legged, double-backed,
You are a living crucifixion!

Translated by Dilip Chitre

Balloon

diluvian yawns
loiter inside its mouth
will they come out?
never! fantastic fish
fade out in these depths
will words come out?
oh no! no!
there will be only a shower of air!

a comb,
a conflict and thread
look! up there —
it hangs
now
it is escaping,
the balloon is escaping into the air!

Translated by Dilip Chitre

PRAKASH BANDEKAR

A Tribute to St. Xavier

St. Francis Xavier what has become of you; o good old father where have you lost your toe

Worms of time have eaten away your sides and you can only know what is left inside those old mummy clothes, a self starven dry bone structure, a shrunken legend

This I hear is the last time they'll expose you to pilgrims St. Xavier four hundred and twelve. They want to seal your chapter once and forever

Oh how I remember your ashen face mocked at the world through glass corners, we shall miss you old father

Do you remember our great expeditions, our last supper with Vasco da Gama and that you loved India, things have changed since then

The other day I lost both prestige and money. I travelled without a ticket in the train

When T.C. leered at me an experienced dentist I wetted my trousers and gave away, the aristocrats watched on

Have you seen India recently, her progressive leap towards destiny?

She is an ancient hag whose wrinkled skin peals off cinema posters. Time has played hell into her, he has ripped open every part of hers with a butcher's skill, he has molested her in public

Yet her cities dress radiantly, their neon signs blink like prostitutes of Foras Street

Moonlight still falls upon her

Do you know that there is war on rice and that there is rationing and that I don't like the idea of waiting for hours in Qs

Have you heard that Parel got drunk yesterday and its shops beamed like French beans

Have you been to Victoria Garden Zoo, have you seen a movie lately

English version by the poet

Song in the Church Yard

Mother forgive them who are bad
Who are mad do not study wake up late
Do not brush their teeth

Forgive them who are gray do not pray
Cross pedestrian crossing without the signal
Cough in movie auditoriums
Empty their bladders & don't pull the flush

Them who beat children in public touch their
Sensitive parts in private & tell them
Homosexuals are bad

Forgive them who masturbate & say god is great

Them who visit whorehouses with no FLs

Who sleep with their sister don't sign the muster
Speak 'Good Heavens' in American accent

Mother forgive them who borrow books & return
Those who haven't read Catullus yet

Who date girls wet their skirts often feel hurt
Then gro moustaches

Forgive them who confess sins after having twins
Drink coke in cold season
Order Masala Dosa & waste it

Mother also forgive them who try
To be good for nothing

Mother you're so lovely
I am looking forward to YOU.

English version by the poet

Eye-View

Through window I would see the ground
Divided by a tar road
Like a shimmering knife in a bread.
There children played Gilly – Dunda.
Beyond that a wall ran a distance,
At once turned to the left, was
Frequented by many who stopped to piss;
But children played and I watched.

If scarcely some grass grew, it was
Devoured by cows and dirtied. A station
At a furlong distance, joined by hundreds
Of rail tracks that lay like lazy snakes.
Then at noon a single engine would run.
Over them shrieking like a naughty child.
I would watch all this

At twelve my neighbour's wife with a
Tiffin can would cut the ground hastily
And disappear leaving it void and empty;
Then I would take bath. Having stripped
Naked before mirror would admire myself,
Masturbate over her.

Now as March ended and summer started
The view in front made a slight movement.
A broad woman should move on her side
And a fold of her skirt should fall;
That's all. The ground: a burnt out toast
But rest is as it was before

English version by the poet

Afternoon Massacre

There is a grasshopper in the building
Descending on the terrace down to the pipe line
Hopping from one window to another
Children gather scream rush over the pavement
Overpassing curious Gorkha who cooked meals
Under staircases

GRASSHOPPER

I thrive one within
Sheltered in my veinual branches
Creeping thru windpipe with queer proximity
Doctors executioners butchers food poisoning
Butlers it's incurable.

Grasshopper grasshopper INNUMERABLE grasshoppers
That's obscure if you count consciously
Stars are innumerable fishes are innumerable
Bitches are innumerable wishes are innumerable
Mosquitoes are innumerable
Kurla is full of mosquitoes they live in slums
Slums are horrible they stink they are a problem
Like exposed St. Xavier four hundred & twelve
They are gray
Ashes are gray
One day the world will become ashes
Slums – you're a distorted image of an ash-tray
I love you slums.
An ecstatic impulse I smoke a cigarette
Think of Pope & increasing population &
Anti-sexual activities of Miss F
& food problem
Outside people roar grasshopper
Shrills whistles tankers motorcades
I see one million trains parked in the porch

Trains motorcades tankers firebrigade aeroplanes
Cars bullock-carts air-compressors allover
Like quills from a bursted pillow
'Attention' yells one toy soldier
Militaries are made of bricks cried another
They fade never die
Cars are made by Henry Ford
Similar to Henry Fonda the buffallo hunter
Beefsteak is cheap in movies
Hindus are prohibited
I am bored of Hinduism they say
World is rested on the great boar
Universe assembles many worlds & many boars
It's dash boring

They shoot matchsticks astringent but accurate
I move bring developer loosen the tab
Shut windows & doors switch on the red lamp
Develop a gigantic grasshopper
In its true shape & changeable colour
Then let dry the film
GANG
BANG
BANG
There goes the civil war
Thirty planes dragon trains two onions one chair
Fifty broken boils 1 kg. carrots & a toy soldier
Fight till death having no faith I am safe
1964 all is well
Children stop their noise & play marbles

English version by the poet

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

P. S. Rege

P. S. REGE *was born in 1910, in a village in the Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra. He was educated at Bombay and at London School of Economics. His first collection of poems—*SADHANA*—was published in 1931. His seventh and latest book of poems—*DUSRA PAKSHI*—appeared in 1966. Besides these, he has published a collection of short stories, two novels, three plays, and a collection of critical essays.*

P. S. Rege is Principal of Elphinstone College, Bombay. Probably the most widely translated of Marathi poets, Rege is known to readers in most of the major Indian languages. His work has also been translated into English, German, Spanish, Chinese, and Danish.

Rege's poems, although widely translated, are highly untranslatable. Their meaning and message is hidden at the surface. A poet who is a great technical virtuoso, P. S. Rege writes a kind of poetry which makes subtle and complex prosodic, phonetic, and syntactical gestures that often defy translation.

Manmohan

MANMOHAN NATU *who is in his fifties now, is perhaps the most original writer of the post-war period in Maharashtra. His most famous work is the epic poem* YUGA YUGANCHE SAHAPRAVASI *(1946). He has also written novels and short stories.*

Ignored by his own generation, Manmohan has a growing reputation among younger writers today.

Besides writing, Manmohan also draws and paints. He lives in Poona.

Sharadchandra Muktibodh

SHARADCHANDRA MADHAV MUKTIBODH *was born in 1921, at Indore, Madhya Pradesh.*

He started writing poems in two languages—Hindi and Marathi. His elder brother, Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh, is a major Hindi poet. Sharadchandra Muktibodh finally chose Marathi for his poetic expression and by the mid-1940s established himself as a powerful and original poet. His best known work is found in the collections NAVI MALWAT *and* YATRIK. *An active Marxist, Muktibodh has also written stimulating literary criticism. His trilogy* KSHIPRA *is an important contribution to the Marathi novel.*

Muktibodh lives in Nagpur where he is a lecturer at Vidharbha Mahavidyalaya.

Muktibodh is a politically committed writer, and this is evident to any reader of his poems. But he has also written some very delicate and evocative lyric poetry. A major influence on modern Marathi poetry, Muktibodh still continues to write in a significant manner, although his recent output is scanty.

Bal Sitaram Mardheker

Bal Sitaram Mardheker (b. 1909) was educated in Poona and London and, until his death in 1956, worked with the All India Radio.

His first collection of poems, SHISHIRAGAM *attracted little attention. But the second created a literary storm.*

He wrote a distinguished book on aesthetics (in English) —ARTS AND THE MAN—*which was published in England during the last war. Later, he wrote more papers in theoretical aesthetics and literary criticism, both in English and in Marathi. He also wrote three experimental novels.*

In these translations, I have tried to bring out the essential awkwardness of his poetic structures (they can be compared in this respect to other translations of mine). I think this awkwardness was almost deliberate and characteristic.

I do not, however, apply this to Dr Kumud Mehta's translations from Mardhekar which make a different and quite useful point.

Indira

Indira Sant was born in 1914. She came into the limelight in the late forties, and by the mid-fifties she was already established as a remarkable lyric poet.

She has published four collections of poems so far : SHELA, MENDI, MRIGAJAL, *and* RANAGABAVARI. *A fifth collection is on the way. She has also written short stories, and stories for children.*

Indira Sant lives in Belgaum where she is the Principal of the Marathi Training College.

Translated here by two poets of a later generation, Indira's poems will invite comparison with the work of early modern lyrical poets in other languages who have affinities with the symbolists. Her work is remarkably similar to that of the first generation European moderns who wrote between the last quarter of the last century and the first quarter of the present one.

Vinda Karandikar

Vinda Karandikar (Govind Vinayak Karandikar) was born in 1918 in the Ratnagiri District of Maharashtra.

A prolific writer, Karandikar began his literary career with SVEDAGANGA—*a collection of poems published in 1949. His second collection of poems was* MRIDGANDHA, *published in 1954. Both the books ran into a second edition which speaks of Karandikar's popularity. His latest collection of poems was published in 1959 and it is entitled* DHRUPAD.

Karandikar has translated Aristotle's POETICS *and Goethe's* FAUST (PART I) *into Marathi. He has published about half a dozen children's books, two collections of prose essays, and*

some literary criticism,—collected now under the title PARAMPARA ANI NAVATA.

Karandikar is a poet who writes a highly intellectualized poetry now, although his early writing is marked by a revolt against reason.

Karandikar lives in Bombay where he is a Professor of English in S.I.E.S. college.

Vasant Bapat

Vasant Bapat's best known collection is BIJLI. *He has a flair for writing songs and his rhetorical style partly derives from the marching-songs, ballads, and "mass-contact" poems he wrote early in his career.*

His handling of traditional verse-forms like the ***lavani*** *is very interesting..*

He teaches Marathi literature at the Ramnarain Ruia College, Bombay.

Sadanand Rege

Sadanand Rege's literary career shows a remarkable rise. He began writing in the forties, but is still springing surprises. His poems show a unique imagination at work; so do his short stories. He has translated Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Ibsen.

He was recently in Norway on a scholarship to study Ibsen's works.

Rege's poems are essentially oblique. The very concrete images become symbolic: each poem of his is like a single, abstract metaphor made out of images which are concrete in themselves, yet point out to the unexpressed context.

AKSHARVEL, GANDHARVA *and* DEVAPUDHACHA DIVA *are his published collections of poems.*

Arati Prabhu

Arati Prabhu is the pseudonym of Chintamani Trayambak Khanolkar. He was born in 1930 at Vengurla in the Ratnagiri District of Maharashtra.

Arati Prabhu started his career as a poet. However, today he is better known as the author of three successful novels and a highly controversial play. He also writes short stories.

Arati Prabhu once ran a small hotel at Kudal. He is now settled in Bombay and lives by his writing.

Unlike most of his contemporaries, Arati Prabhu has not had university education. He cannot be said to have been influenced by modern western literature with which his work show striking affinities. Some of his fiction is astonishingly original and intriguing. His poetic experiments are equally interesting.

Arun Kolatkar

Arun Kolatkar (b. 1932) is the most enigmatic figure in contemporary Marathi poetry. A poet who returned to the tradition of Tukaram after a long exploratory voyage through the work of Catullus, Villon, Rimbaud, Apollonaire, Rilke, Lorca, Pound, Hart Crane, Williams, and Pablo Neruda — Kolatkar's own writing is extremely original in spite of this exposure to "foreign" influences. His influence on youger poets, especially the rebels in Poona and Bombay, is great. But he usually keeps to himself, publishes his work rarely, and is yet to publish his first collection of poems.

Kolatkar is a successful graphic artist and is reputed in the advertising world for his brilliant work.

He writes in both English and Marathi and is also a painter.

He has translated Tukaram into English. Some of his translations appeared in POETRY INDIA *(January-March 1966), and were exceptionally praised both here and abroad.*

Kolatkar's poems shows marked surrealistic traits. But his novel use of organic metaphor (e.g. HORSE*) shows the variety of his creative experiment.*

In THREE CUPS OF TEA *I think he gives us a native Marathi parallel to neo-dada or pop poetry. The recent poems he has written, including the one just mentioned, are an attempt to arrive at a zero-degree in poetic style to restore to it its functionality.*

Dilip Chitre

Dilip Chitre was born in Baroda in 1938. He came to Bombay in his early teens, met Arun Kolatkar in 1954, and started the poetry magazine SHABDA *with a group of young poets.*

His first collection of poems, KAVITA, *was published in 1960. In 1960 he went to Ethiopia, where he lived for the next three years.*

He now lives in Bombay. After giving up his last job as a sales promotion executive in an American pharmaceutical company, he is now working on a translation project of his own.

P. B. Wader

Very few people know P. B. Wader (b. 1932) as a poet, although he is quite well-known as a short story writer. In fact, he was himself surprised when he was requested to allow us to publish a translation of his poem in this anthology ("Are you sure it isn't an anthology of short-stories?" he wrote).

The poem included here appeared in the short-lived poetry-magazine SHABDA *in 1955.*

P. B. Wader teaches in a college in Goa, he has recently translated a Tennessee Williams play.

This poem of Wader's was one of the first Marathi poems

to reject the Romantic style totally. Concrete description with an oblique but certainly emotive purpose seems to me to be a useful way of describing this poem.

Bandu Waze

Almost unknown today outside a small circle of poets and painters, Bandu Waze was once a well-known painter among the bohemian artistic circle in Bombay, then meeting daily at the Artists' Aid Fund Centre.

His poems first appeared in SHABDA, *and his latest work was published recently in* ASO. *Waze gave up painting and writing some years ago and has since been living in a temple near Poona.*

The first poem is dadaistic: but Waze does not intend an anarchy in form. The organization of the poem is not deliberately irrational: it is only ***functionally*** *non-rational in the best dadaistic tradition.*

The second poem alludes to an Upanishadic passage. In structure, it is absolutely unlike the first one. The metaphor is the familiar semi-abstract metaphor used by Hindu mystics and wisdom writers.

Sudhir Kolatkar

Sudhir Kolatkar (b. 1935) is a mechanical draughtsman by profession and he lives in a suburb of Bombay.

His first collection of poems was published in 1960, along with the first printed (it used to be mimeographed earlier) issue of SHABDA. *His latest work has appeared in* ASO.

I consider Sudhir Kolatkar, along with Damodar Prabhu and Raghu Dandavate, one of the most interesting of the poets of the sixties.

*I have chosen these poems from his miniature collection of poems—*KAVITA.

Bhalchandra Nemade

Balchandra Nemade was born in 1938. His first novel KOSLA *has become almost a contemporary classic. His fame as a novelist has eclipsed Nemade's accomplishment as a poet, almost following a literary law — novelists being more popular than poets.*

Nemade's early poems appeared in SHABDA *and P. S. Rege's* CHHANDA, *and they still remain uncollected.*

Nemade lives in Aurangabad, where he is a lecturer in English literature.

Manohar Oak

Monohar Oak (b. 1933) lives in Bombay. His first poems was published in SHABDA *in 1960 under the pseudonym Baba Dikshit. His recent work appeared in* ABHIRUCHI *and* BHAROOD.

He has written a novel on the hashish-smokers in Bombay called CHERSI, *and another one called* THE CLAIRVOYANT, *both of which remain unpublished.*

Once a bank clerk (he has not taken up any job after giving up the last one), he is now planning to launch a book-club to promote the reading of books which he intends to publish himself on a co-operative basis, with other writers.

Sharadkumar Mantri

Sharad Mantri has been writing verse for nearly twenty years now, and his work remains uncollected. Although he has written 'through' every movement represented in this anthology, Mantri still retains an uninhibited experimenter's outlook.

His early work appeared in ABHIRUCHI *in the forties and fifties. The poem selected here, however, appeared in* ASO.

Mantri lives in Bombay. He is an officer in the Reserve Bank of India.

He also writes short stories.

Narayan Surve

Narayan Surve (b. 1926) lost his parents at a very young age and literally grew up in the streets of Bombay.

He passed out of primary school when he was in his thirties. His formal education was cut short at the stage.

He is a communist. His first collection of poems AISA GA MEE BRAHMA *was received very well three years ago. His second collection,* MAAZE VIDYAPEETH, *was published recently.*

Surve lives in Bombay earning his living as a teacher in a municipal primary school.

He has translated some short stories from Urdu.

Damodar Prabhu

Damodar Janardan Prabhu was born in 1935.

A drugs salesman by profession, Prabhu became interested in poetry when he came across Rilke and T. S. Eliot. His work kept him moving throughout Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh and during his travels he absorbed modern literature among other things.

In the beginning, Prabhu wrote poems in English. Later, he found the foreign language inadequate while dealing with more native themes and substances, and he switched over to Marathi. His poems were published in ASO *and* ABHIRUCHI.

Damodar Prabhu's work has a curious quality: it is extremely unlike the work of contemporary Marathi poets. An unusual imagination, and a very original handling of language, marks his work.

Prakash Bandekar

Prakash Bandekar is approaching his thirties. He is originally from Goa although his family moved from place to place. Bandekar is a graphic artist by profession and until recently, he worked in an advertising agency in Bombay.

He started writing poems quite recently and his work first appeared in the avant garde Marathi little magazine ASO *(meaning: Amen) edited by Asoka Shahane. His poems were also published in* ABHIRUCHI.

The poems included here are 'strong', ***avant garde*** *stuff. The English verisons were written by Bandekar himself.*

Bandekar now lives in Malaysia, where he works as a graphic artist.

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